

Donors, civil society and democratisation in Rwanda

A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

This paper offers a critical examination of the claim that donors' support to civil society contributes to democratisation in Rwanda. The theoretical assumptions underlying the liberal discourse on civil society and democratisation are presented and illustrated by donors' policies and political analysis of contemporary Rwanda. In essence, the donors assert that lack of civil society capacity is the main obstacle to democratisation. Secondly, an alternative explanatory model of contemporary Rwandan politics is presented, which identifies authoritarian political structures as the root of the country's democratic deficit. Lastly, a third explanatory model is constructed in the form of complementary theoretical contributions critical of the dominant school of democratisation. It argues that the liberal democratic model is unequipped to address key structural characteristics of Rwanda, specifically the continued divide between rights-bearing citizens and subjects unable to exercise their rights in any meaningful way. There is thus the need to go beyond the liberal minimalistic definitions of democracy to a more substantive definition which concerns citizens' ability to make use of political instruments.

The paper then explores the three different models' ability to explain two key processes in contemporary Rwanda, specifically the government's long-term development plan, the *Vision 2020*, and the ongoing decentralisation process. The empirical accuracy of the explanatory models is assessed, and serves as an entry point to a discussion about donor interventions' impact on Rwandan state – society relations. The findings indicate that donor support to civil society since the year 2000 has not contributed to democratisation in Rwanda. This holds true for both minimalist and substantive definitions of democratisation. Rather, the result of donor interventions has been the formation of a 'bifurcated' Rwandan civil society, as donors have stimulated the growth of an elite section of civil society consisting of professionalised, urban-based and advocacy-oriented organisations. These have, however, been unable to perform key functions attributed to civil society in the liberal discourse, such as influencing policy and holding power-holders accountable. This is due, I argue, to the combination of the strength of the Rwandan state, which is remarkable in a regional comparative perspective, and the government's preferred mode of civil society as an extension of the state in service provision rather than as a political actor.

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All errors are mine alone.

Torstein Taksdal Skjeseth

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List of acronyms:

AU	African Union
CDR	Comité de Défense de la Révolution
DED	German Development Agency
DfID	Department for International Development
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EDPRS	Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy
Eurac	European Network for Central Africa
GBS	General Budget Support
GoR	Government of Rwanda
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
JGA	Joint Governance Assessment
LDGL	La Ligue des Droits de la personne dans la region des Grands Lacs
LIPRODHOR	Ligue Rwandaise Pour La Promotion Et La Défence des Droits De l’Homme
MDR	Mouvement Démocratique Républicain
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
SIDA	Swedish Development Agency
UK	United Kingdom

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Figure 1: The challenges of democratic popular control of public affairs (Törnquist 2009)... 49

Table 1: Views of Rwanda’s democratic deficit

1 Introduction

After the end of the Cold War, the concept of civil society and its potential as a driver for democratisation gained increased attention among policy-makers and scholars. Following experiences with political liberalisation in Latin America and Eastern Europe, the notion of civil society and its positive contribution to democracy was introduced in sub-Saharan Africa¹ in the early 1990s (Sjøgren 2001: 35). Linked to the concept of *good governance*, which was introduced by the World Bank as a precondition for both development and democracy, donors of development aid increasingly included support to local civil society organisations for development and democratisation purposes in their engagement with African countries.

Two decades later, African politics remains largely a game for elites (Shivji 2009). Transitions to democracy from authoritarian rule or civil conflict in a number of African countries in the 1990s, joining what Huntington labeled the ‘third wave of democratisation’, were often best described as ‘elite transitions’ (Bond 2000). The current dominant school of democracy promotion with its emphasis on political elites’ agency and the ‘crafting of democracy’ through institutions and procedures such as civil society and decentralisation (Harris et al. 2004: 5), does not appear to have altered this elitist nature of African politics.

In the context of continued failure to generate inclusionary democratic systems, then, the question becomes what kind of *civil society* and what kind of *democracy* proponents have in mind when they claim that the two are casually related with civil society the independent variable (Kasfir 1998: 124). As civil society reflects specific historical processes, power relations and cleavages in society at large, experiences with civil society and democratisation from other parts of the world are not necessarily applicable in the African context (Wake 2004). Notwithstanding the analytical ambiguity of the term and its uncertain ability to ‘travel’, however, the close links between policy makers’ concepts, practices and policies are currently structuring both understandings and formations of actual civil society (Sjøgren 2001: 35).

The civil society thesis is firmly rooted in liberal political thought, and applies a narrow definition of (liberal) democracy. Critics argue that the introduction of this model in the context of deep poverty and a continued divide between rights-bearing citizens and *subjects*

¹ From here on ‘Africa’ will refer to the 53 countries south of the Sahara

(Mamdani 1996) fails to address underlying power relations and to integrate the majority poor in democratic politics. Moreover, by insisting on the liberal democratic model, other understandings of political democracy that might be more suitable to address the concerns of the poor majority in Africa are excluded from the outset (Abrahamsen 2002: xiii).

As the civil society thesis remains a central component in democracy promoters' toolbox in Africa, it is increasingly being linked with institutional reforms towards *decentralisation* and *local democratisation* within the good governance discourse. However, there are few critical analysis of whether this generates the expected outcomes, especially in terms of democratisation (Harris et al. 2004: 3). This paper will contribute to reducing this knowledge gap by critically examine *actual* dynamics of donors, civil society and democratisation in Rwanda.

1.1 Choice of case

Despite the exceptionality of Rwanda's recent history with genocide and subsequent transformation into a 'developmental state' (Kinzer 2008), I argue that donor policies in Rwanda are representative for their engagement with hybrid regimes² elsewhere in Africa. Being a small, overpopulated and landlocked country without oil or other natural resources of significance, Rwanda presents no immediate geopolitical importance for her donors. Aid to Rwanda, then, is relatively 'clean' (Uvin 1998: 5). The relative absence of interests distorting donor priorities is likely to render donors' strategies in Rwanda representative for the underlying assumptions of the current dominant school of democracy promotion.

Several scholars note that Rwanda serves as a 'laboratory' for the new post-conflict agenda that donors began to implement in the late 1990s (Uvin 2001: 184). This is partly the result of the development aid enterprise's inability to deal with - or unwitting complicity in - the Habyarimana regime's course towards genocidal violence, and an ensuing need to fundamentally rethink its strategies (Uvin 1998). If Rwanda is to serve as a crystal ball for how donors negotiate the dilemmas of peace and democracy in post-conflict contexts, it is of vital importance for scholars. Liberia, South Sudan, and Burundi, among others, come to mind when considering other cases of fragile, post-conflict countries in which donors support local civil society for democratisation purposes.

² Term used for regimes combining democratic and authoritarian practices. How this applies to Rwanda will be further elaborated on in Chapter 3

Beyond post-conflict countries, lessons from donor policies in Rwanda are relevant in other ‘developmental states’, with particularly Ethiopia coming to mind in the African context. The visible developmental successes of various non-democratic regimes, with Rwanda being a case in point, are often invoked by development workers in arguments about the advisability of democracy (Carothers 2010: 24). The tension between traditional development practitioners and democracy promoters, while possibly softening (Ibid), is more pronounced in Rwanda than in most other countries.

In arguing that donor policies in Rwanda are representative while the country itself is exceptional, this paper offers an implicit critique of the ‘one size fits all’ tendency in the aid enterprise. While often emphasising that ‘local conditions matter’, the combination of aid policy makers’ belief in certain political values³ thought to hold universal sway and aid officials’ often limited contextual knowledge due to short postings and career incentives, limits their ability to design context-specific programs.

1.1.1 Time limitation

The period under scrutiny is limited to the year 2000 until present. Although the renewed interest for civil society occurred in the early 1990s, it was not a priority for donors until the early 2000s in post-genocide Rwanda. In the initial period of reconstruction after the genocide most donor assistance came in the form of humanitarian aid and efforts to reconstruct basic state institutions (Uvin 2001). By the year 2000, Rwanda’s security situation had improved considerably, allowing for more long-term planning and a broadening of the scope of donor activities. Among these was financial and technical aid to Rwandan civil society, often with the explicit goal of promoting democratisation (Hayman 2009: 66).

The year 2000 also marked the collapse of Rwanda’s government of national unity, which served as a transitional government after the 1994 genocide. The end of the government of national unity marks the beginning of a decade of absolute *Rwandan Patriotic Front* (RPF) dominance of Rwandan politics⁴ and their efforts to transform society and state – society relations. The period also covers the implementation of two key processes in contemporary

³ This is of course even more valid in democracy promotion than in traditional development work

⁴ The RPF was clearly the biggest fish in the pond also between the 1994 genocide and 2000, but ruled with more serious constraints as part of the government of national unity. See Prunier (2009) for a tale of this period

Rwanda, the *Vision 2020* and the decentralisation process, both of which were drafted in the early years of the decade.

1.2 Aim of the paper

This paper will attempt to empirically examine the validity of donors' claim that support to civil society contributes to democratisation in Rwanda. It aims to do so by constructing three different explanatory models in the analysis of contemporary Rwanda and its relative democratic deficit, and test their empirical validity. These models will simultaneously provide the theoretical framework for the thesis through which observations will be organised and analysed. The theoretical contributions can be broadly classified into proponents of the liberal view on civil society and democratisation, and critical contributions arguing for the need to broaden understandings of democracy.

Firstly, the paper will set out to uncover the donors' theoretical assumptions about civil society and democratisation by exploring their policies and political analysis of contemporary Rwanda. By so doing, the donors' perception of civil society's (theoretical) role and (contextual) agency will be illuminated.

The paper will then move on to present an alternative, more conventional explanatory model of contemporary Rwanda. According to proponents of this view, authoritarian political structures are at the heart of Rwanda's political deficit. Applying a *state-centered* perspective, it contrasts sharply with the donors' analysis based on a *society-centered* perspective.

Finally, a third explanatory model will be presented in the form of a selection of complementary theoretical contributions critical of the dominant school of democratisation. It will be argued that the liberal democratic model is unequipped to address key structural characteristics of Rwanda, such as the continued divide between rights-bearing citizens and subjects unable to exercise their rights in any meaningful way. There is thus the need to go beyond the liberal minimalistic definitions to a more substantive definition of democracy which concerns citizens' ability to make use of political instruments.

The paper will then move on to test the ability of the three models in explaining two processes of fundamental importance in contemporary Rwanda, and specifically the role of civil society in shaping and influencing these. The processes under scrutiny are: i) the formulation and

implementation of the government of Rwanda's long-term development strategy, the *Vision 2020*, which lays out the key political priorities and the direction for Rwanda's development; and ii) the outcomes of the decentralisation process documented so far. Taken together, these processes define much of the content and form of contemporary Rwandan state-society relations and provide the basis for the government's discourse on good governance, development and democratisation.

The relative accuracy of the different positions in explaining these processes and the impact of the donors' intervention in informing these will then be assessed. Based on these findings, the paper will conclude by discussing the relative contribution of donors' support to civil society support for democratisation.

1.2.1 Research Question

The overall research question is the following:

Has donor support to civil society since the year 2000 contributed to democratisation in Rwanda?

The distinction will be made between *minimalist* and *substantive* understandings of democracy. In order to attend to the overall research question, a sub-set of questions will be addressed. First, we need to identify the main arguments of the three different positions on democratisation in Rwanda, with an emphasis on implications for civil society agency. In the following chapters, then, the paper will attempt to answer the following;

What are the main arguments of the three different positions on Rwandan politics and relative democratic deficit?

The three different positions will then serve as rival explanatory models in explaining empirical evidence from two key processes in contemporary Rwanda. Thus, their empirical validity will be assessed by answering the following question;

What are the strengths and weaknesses of these explanatory models in explaining i) the formulation and implementation of the Vision 2020; and ii) the current decentralisation reform?

Lastly, the different positions and their ability to explain these processes will be summarised. The findings will be used as an entry point to a discussion about how donor interventions have affected Rwandan state – society relations and whether it has contributed to democratisation.

1.3 Outline of the thesis

The thesis is divided in eight chapters. Chapter two discusses the choice of research design and the validity of the data gathered in order to answer the research question. The issues of construct validity and overall reliability are considered the chief challenges in this research, and will be discussed in some length. Chapter three provides background information on Rwanda, her donors and civil society in order to contextualise the ensuing chapters. The issue of ethnicity and its impact on contemporary state formation and civil society will receive special attention, as it has been *the* defining feature of Rwandan reality since the arrival of the European colonisers.

Chapter four then moves on to present the theoretical assumptions of the liberal discourse on civil society and democratisation, illustrated by donors' political analysis of contemporary Rwanda and perceptions of civil society's role and agency. The typical donor representation of Rwanda is dominated by what I refer to as the *success story narrative* and an alleged, current process of democratisation. In chapter five the conventional view about Rwanda's democratic deficit will be presented. In sharp contrast to the donor view, authoritarian political structures are considered the chief obstacle to democratisation in Rwanda. Chapter six moves beyond the debate about contemporary Rwandan politics and presents a selection of complementary theoretical contributions critical of the dominant school of democratisation. Promoting the liberal democratic model in a context of a continued divide between rights-bearing citizens and subjects, it will be argued, is more likely to lead to elite reproduction than substantive forms of democratisation. Hence, the case is made for a broader, substantive understanding of democracy.

Chapter seven summarises the findings from chapters 4 – 6, which serve as the point of departure for the empirical analysis. It will move on to present empirical evidence from two key processes in contemporary Rwanda, the development strategy *Vision 2020* and the current decentralisation reform, and consider the various models' ability to explain these. Chapter

eight summarises the main findings. Civil society support to Rwanda since 2000, it will be argued, does not seem to have contributed to democratisation in either minimal or substantive understandings, but has contributed to forming a bifurcated version of Rwandan civil society.

2 Research design

The objective of this paper is to conduct a contextual analysis of the dynamics of donors, civil society and democratisation in Rwanda. This section will discuss the quality of the research design and the data gathered in order to achieve this objective.

2.1 Case studies

The choice of research design should be guided by the research question (Grønmo 2004: 75). In order to conduct an in-depth, empirical investigation, the case study design is the most feasible option. A case study is an in-depth investigation into one case belonging to a larger universe of cases. Various methods can be applied within the overall case study design, though they are all necessarily qualitative approaches.

It is not the aim of this paper to establish new theories on the interplay of donors, civil society and democratisation. Rather, the paper aims to contribute to reducing the knowledge gap on the actual outcomes of the civil society and democratisation thesis, specifically when linked with decentralisation reforms (Harris et al. 2004: 3). In this vein, the paper will apply existing theories of civil society and democratisation to organise gathered data and facilitate the subsequent analysis. This approach is what Andersen (1997: 68) refers to as the 'theory interpretive design'.

As the choice of research design and approach suggests, it is not the top priority of this study to produce generalisable findings. The potential of generalising findings from a single case to a larger set of cases is indeed at the heart of the debate about the case study design, as scientists adhering to the classic, positivist tradition commonly regard the case study as having limited scientific value. Arend Lijphart (1971) ranks the case study as the least valuable out of four overall research designs, with experiments being the most valuable. Operating with a small number of units of analysis (N), he argues, makes it impossible to control for third variables and hence to determine causality. The case study, then, 'can constitute neither the basis for a valid generalisation nor the ground for disproving an established generalisation' (Ibid: 691). In support of this view, King, Keohane & Verba (1994: 8) conclude that for scientific research 'the accumulation of facts alone is not

sufficient. (...) the key distinguishing mark of scientific research is the goal of making inferences that go beyond particular observations collected’.

By arguing that the very essence of science is generalising findings, however, important sub-disciplines in the social sciences, such as ethnography, are neglected. Exploratory studies regularly provide quantitatively oriented researchers with new knowledge and prompt statistical studies into previously unknown causal relationships. This is due to the superior ability of the case study to allow for contextual analyses uncovering the mechanisms and processes of phenomena and causal relationships. This is arguably the weakness of the statistical research design which do not explain the how and why’s of correlation.

Furthermore, Goldstone (2003) and Mahoney (2003) demonstrate the valuable contribution of the single case study in enabling researchers to compile together case studies of certain phenomena, for instance that of revolutions, to be used on an aggregated level in statistical analyses. In this vein, this paper can contribute to a growing literature documenting outcomes of donor support to civil society for democratisation purposes⁵.

I argue that the idiosyncratic nature of the case study design and its superior ability to consider particular historical processes and complexities makes it especially well suited for a study of Rwanda for two reasons. Firstly, there is a highly politicised struggle for the truth about Rwanda’s history and contemporary reality (Uvin 1998; Mamdani 2001). In this context, data aggregated to a macro level run a considerable risk of being politically biased and low on validity. While the risk to engage in high levels of subjectivity in the gathering and interpretation of data is generally high in case studies (Yin 2003: 93), the case study design simultaneously offers greater opportunities to minimise subjectivity in terms of political bias through attentive source criticism.

Secondly, Rwanda’s pre-colonial and modern political history is exceptional⁶. While all countries are of course unique, Rwanda is often cited as a case in point by scholars frustrated with lax generalisations on the African continent. Statistical studies comparing data aggregated to country level are not equipped to capture these particularities (Goldstone 2003; Mahoney 2003). The case study, then, provides an opportunity to avoid the a-historic nature that often characterizes analyses of African politics (Shivji 2009).

⁵ See for instance Hearn (1997) and Brodal (2008)

⁶ See Chapter 3

2.2 Validity and reliability

The scientific value of a study is determined by the validity and reliability of the data collected (Adcock & Collier 2001). The relative validity of data relies on its ability to answer the research question. Reliability relates to how data is collected and the degree to which identical studies would produce similar results (Hellevik 1999: 183).

2.2.1 Internal validity

Internal validity concerns the quality of a causal relationship in a study. Internal validity is traditionally considered among the strengths of the case study design, as it allows the researcher to focus on the mechanisms through which outcomes occur, rather than the frequency with which they occur (George & Bennett 2004: 31). This paper sets out to investigate the validity of an alleged causal relationship between civil society support and democratisation. By identifying three different explanatory models as the point of departure for the empirical analysis, the internal validity of the study is enhanced.

2.2.2 Construct validity

Construct validity relates to the relative correspondence between a theoretical concept and the empirical world (Adcock & Collier 2001). Central concepts in this study – civil society and democracy – are analytically ambiguous and contested concepts, leaving construct validity problematic. As part of the motivation for this paper is to examine different understandings of *democracy* and their implications, construct validity will be achieved by presenting in a clear and accurate manner the various actors' interpretations of the concept.

Large amounts of literature within political theory have been devoted to define the concept of *civil society*, and it is beyond this thesis to engage in a similar exercise. As the research question relates directly to donors' perceptions of civil society, high construct validity will be accomplished by accurately identifying what is perceived by donors to represent civil society. To this end I have conducted interviews with the majority of key donors in Kigali, attended a civil society seminar and examined a wide range of donors' strategy papers and studies.

Personal working experience with civil society support in Africa contributes to strengthen my understanding of what constitutes civil society in the view of western donors, thereby increasing construct validity.

Presenting an opinion as *the donors' view* is not unproblematic. Donors in this study refer to bilateral donors, grand international financial institutions and the International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGO) who execute the dominant policy agenda with resources largely drawn from the development aid budget posts of bilateral donors. Many actors qualify to the term donor in present-day Rwanda, and to some extent they have differing agendas and understandings of concepts such as democracy, good governance and civil society. However, as will be demonstrated, there is a discernable commonality as to the core assumptions of the liberal discourse on civil society and democratisation, which drives much policy making in the development aid enterprise. While internal differences will be discussed in detail, the analysis will focus on the core assumptions when constructing the *donor view*.

2.2.3 External validity

External validity relates to the potential of generalising findings from a study to a wider universe of cases. While the *outcome* of the interplay between donors, civil society and democratisation is conditioned by realities specific to Rwanda and not immediately valid in other contexts, I argue that the findings from the donors' political analysis and policies in dealing with authoritarian political structures, has potential for generalising. As discussed earlier, development aid to Rwanda is largely free of distorting interests guiding policies and behavior and regarded by many as a 'laboratory' for donors' post-conflict agenda. These conditions should enable the study to produce what Yin (1993) calls *analytical generalisable* findings that can be generalised to a wider universe of *theoretical* units. This entails that findings might be valid for and generalised to a set of cases characterised by similar conditions as the Rwandan case, specifically post-conflict or/and developmental states. This study, then, is an example of what Gerring (2007: 20) describes as an intensive study of a single case where the purpose of that study is – at least in part – to shed light on a larger class of cases.

2.2.4 Reliability

The degree to which an identical study would produce similar results determines the reliability of a study. This is especially challenging in qualitative studies, as the researcher's active interpretation and subjectivity in collecting and analysing data plays a significant role

in determining the outcome. This makes it pressing to ensure that the methods that have been used in a study are well documented, in what Yin (2003: 105) calls a 'chain of evidence'.

The relatively low number of interviews conducted during the field work for this thesis (10) leaves in question the representativeness and reliability of the data collected and rules out the possibility of making inferences based on the interviews alone. Adding to the low reliability of the data gathered in interviews is the risk that critical statements can lead to repercussions⁷ in present-day Rwanda, leading several of my informants to prefer *off record* interviews. Due to these issues, the data collected through the interviews in Kigali will merely serve to supplement and illustrate findings based on secondary sources.

Significant parts of the data material constituting the basis for this study stems from donors' various project documents and strategy papers, collected partly in Kigali and partly by e-mail correspondence with aid officials. Uvin (1998) refers to this as 'grey literature', which is not immediately available to the public. In principle, the reliability of this data is low as other researchers would struggle to obtain exactly the same material and thus to replicate the gathering of data. However, my observation corresponds with Uvin's (Ibid: 9), that whatever the source of the documents, they present largely the same information, thereby limiting the implications for the reliability of the data.

Despite these caveats, however, the reliability of the study is not optimal due to the low transparency resulting from the many *ad-hoc* arrangements in the form of off record interviews, informal talks and grey literature.

2.3 Sources

The research draws on both primary and secondary sources for reaching its objectives. Such triangulation of sources serves to enhance the data's reliability (Yin 2003: 97). The primary data consists of information gathered through ten interviews⁸ with aid officials representing key donors and civil society representatives in Kigali in January and February 2010. In addition, the report from a Joint Governance Assessment exercise carried out in 2008 by

⁷ While donors risk decreased good-will from the authorities, the threat can be far more serious for civil society representatives. See Reyntjens (2011) for a long list of critics who have been forced to leave the country based on their criticism of the current Rwandan leadership. These include Hutu, Tutsi and foreigners alike

⁸ All interviews were off record, excluding the opportunity to include a list of informants

donors and the government of Rwanda provided useful insight into government – donor relations.

Secondary data consists largely of academic literature for increased understanding of historic background and context. An important source for data on actual civil society in Rwanda is the mapping exercise of Rwandan civil society undertaken by the Kampala-based think tank *Kituo Cha Katiba* (Peter & Kibalama 2006). For preliminary outcomes of Rwanda's current decentralisation reform, I rely on a selection of empirical studies documenting the outcomes on at a local level conducted by scholar such as Ansoms (2009) and Gready (2010), as well as observations from Eurac (2011a), a network of European Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) concerned with Central Africa. Because of the few sources and limited empirical evidence from the decentralisation reform available so far, I will refrain from inferring on the basis of these alone.

3 Background

3.1 Rwanda's contested history

The political history of Rwanda offers some unusual aspects in the African context. Rwanda was established as a sovereign polity with centralised political power and borders that correspond roughly with those of present-day Rwanda before the arrival of the German colonisers (Uvin 1998: 20). The formative period of the centralised state, benefitting from a mountainous landscape that offered natural borders and favorable conditions for defense of its territory, can be traced to a series of wars that began in the 18th century (Mamdani 2001: 63).

The Rwandan state's strength and control over its territory and society is striking in a regional comparative perspective. While limitations in state building leading to the inability of the central authority to penetrate and control social organisation and economy throughout its territory is often the point of departure for analysis of African politics (Migdal 1988), this does not apply to Rwanda. As Uvin (1998: 22) notes, Rwanda was and continues to be a strong state in every meaning of the term, both in its capacity for effective and uncontested control of its entire territory and in the muscled nature of this power.

This long history with centralised political rule and rigid hierarchies of power is often invoked by scholars arguing that there is a strong political culture of obedience in Rwanda. While there is some debate about this⁹, Prunier's (1995: 304) assertion that respect for authority is a fundamental trait of Rwandese culture is shared by most Rwanda observers.

3.1.1 Ethnicity in Rwanda

By far the most contested issue in the history of Rwanda is the question of ethnic¹⁰ identities. Despite large bodies of literature arguing for different versions of the history of the Hutu and the Tutsi¹¹, their origins, time of arrival to Rwanda and the nature of the relations between the groups, there is no consensus of scientific knowledge to answer any of these questions. The

⁹ See for instance Collins 1998 and Vidal 1998

¹⁰ The nature of the Hutu and Tutsi identities is controversial. While the colonisers constructed them as *rac*es, Mamdani (2001) discuss them as *political* identities changing over time. Others claim they are purely *occupational*, and some refer to them as *tribes*.

¹¹ It is estimated that the Hutu comprise approximately 85 percent of the population, and the Tutsi 14 percent

most widely accepted version, however, is that the Twa¹² are the longest-standing inhabitants of the Rwandan territory, followed by the arrival of agriculturalist Hutu and later the cattle-rearing Tutsi (Uvin 1998: 15). The coming of the Tutsi to the area led to the establishment of a centralised monarch (Peter & Kibalama 2006: 16). The extremely high level of contemporary political importance attached to these issues must be attributed to the arrival of the European colonisers and their scientific racism based upon the all-important *search for origins* (Mamdani 2001: 43).

Whether there exist objective, defining traits separating the Hutu and the Tutsi is among the most debated issues related to ethnicity in Rwanda. The alleged absence of such objective differences constitutes the point of departure for the current regime's narrative on identities. However, as Uvin (1998: 14) notes, ethnicity is not a matter of objective distinctions, but rather a social construct. Regardless of the objective basis for separate ethnic identities, they have been and continue to be a reality of fundamental importance in Rwanda and cannot simply be wished away by pointing to cultural similarities¹³ (Ibid: 15).

3.1.2 Colonialism, civil war and genocide

The Belgian colonisers¹⁴ established a system in which the Hutu majority was constructed as *natives* and ruled by Tutsi chiefs constructed as *non-natives*. The idea of the Tutsi as a superior race was conceived in the *Hamitic hypothesis* that traced the origins of the Tutsi to Ethiopia, thereby explaining away every sign of civilisation in tropical Africa as a foreign import (Mamdani 2001: 47; 16). With Belgian indirect rule, the social relationships in Rwanda became more uniform, rigid¹⁵, unequal, and exploitative than ever, with a clear hierarchy from the coloniser to Tutsi to Hutu to Twa (Uvin 1998: 17).

The form of colonised rule formed the revolt against it (Mamdani 1996). In 1959 the Belgians suddenly switched their favour to the Hutu (Pruner 1995: 49), paving the way for a violent transformation of Rwanda that saw the overthrow of the Tutsi monarchy and its replacement by a Presidential Republic through the so-called 1959 'social revolution'. The fundamental ideology behind the revolution was that by wresting power away from the Tutsi minority, the

¹² Which constitutes approximately 1 percent of the population and are politically insignificant

¹³ Similarities include the same language and a history of intermarriage. It is often claimed that the difference between the groups was occupational with fluid borders before the arrival of the Europeans

¹⁴ Germany lost the territory following their defeat in the First World War, with the League of Nations placing Rwanda under Belgian control in 1924

¹⁵ Ethnic identity was even described in people's identity cards

Hutu majority had by definition installed true majority democracy, in which the new power holders, by virtue of belonging to the Hutu ethnic group, were representative of the vast majority of Rwandans (Uvin 1998: 19; 26).

The Belgians formally transferred sovereignty to local authorities in 1962. Both the ensuing First Republic under Kayibanda (1962 – 73) and the Second Republic under Habyarimana (1973 – 94) based their claim to legitimacy on ethnic allegiance. At occasions when their power was challenged, the incumbents often resorted to firing up under ethnic hatred, igniting waves of political mass violence¹⁶ that resulted in the death of tens of thousands and the flight into exile of hundreds of thousands Tutsi (Uvin 1998: 20).

The majority of the exiled Tutsi settled in southern Uganda, from where they early on began sending armed incursions into Rwanda to destabilise the Kayibanda regime (Kinzer 2008: 12). These so-called *inyenzi* raids were the predecessor to the RPF invasion of Rwanda in 1990, marking the beginning of the civil war that was to culminate in the 1994 genocide. Consisting mainly of descendants of Tutsi refugees, many in the RPF high command had attained high-ranking positions in Yoweri Museveni's *National Resistance Army*. Despite their contribution in the successful campaign to oust then Ugandan President Milton Obote, the Tutsi population was not granted citizenship rights when Museveni came to power. In this context, the RPF invasion of Rwanda must be seen as both an invasion of Rwanda and an armed repatriation from Uganda (Mamdani 2001: 17).

The ensuing civil war between the Habyarimana regime and the RPF led by Paul Kagame¹⁷ further escalated ethnic tensions within Rwanda. The international community¹⁸ facilitated peace talks in Arusha in Tanzania. The *Arusha Accords* provided for the establishment of a broad-based transitional government which included RPF ministers while Habyarimana was to remain President. While the genuineness of the parties' commitment to the agreement was always in doubt (it is often argued that at least Habyarimana never intended to comply with it), it was eventually signed¹⁹. Crucially, the extremist party *Comité de Défense de la Révolution* (CDR) with strong links to Habyarimana's party was denied posts in the transitional government. Thus, as Habyarimana signed the agreement, the CDR, along with

¹⁶ Most notably in the early 1960s, the 'Second Revolution' in 1973, and of course the 1994 genocide

¹⁷ Who took over after RPF Commander Fred Rwigema was killed shortly after the invasion

¹⁸ Primarily France, USA and the African Union (Peter & Kibalama 2006: 29)

¹⁹ It also, in theory, came into practice on January 1st 1994. However, the swearing in of the new Ministers was repeatedly blocked by allies of the President (Peter & Kibalama 2006: 30)

other elements, was systematically preparing for the ‘final solution’ in the form of genocide, the extension of the Tutsi (Kinzer 2008: 107 – 109).

The genocide began shortly after President Habyarimana’s plane was shot down²⁰ on approaching Kigali airport on April 6th, 1994. In the following 100 days, between five hundred thousand and one million²¹ Tutsi and ‘moderate’ Hutu²² were killed in the most efficient genocide the world has ever seen²³. While the causes of the genocide included overpopulation and land pressure (Diamond 2005), economic recession, unwitting complicity by the development aid enterprise and external pressure for democratisation through the Arusha Accords (Uvin 1998: 53 – 56, 234), the nature and the extent of the violence was made possible only by the omnipresent and institutionalised ethnic hatred. Thus, I agree with Mamdani (2001: 9, 14) when he argues that the Rwandan genocide needs to be understood within the logic of colonialism, as a ‘native’s genocide’ in which those who saw themselves as sons and daughters of Rwanda cleared their soil of a threatening *alien* presence.

3.2 Contemporary state formation: from genocide to developmental state

The RPF victory in the civil war brought an end to the genocide, and a transitional government was installed in line with the Arusha Accords²⁴. The new government was a genuine government of national unity, which, after the genocide, looked like a ‘small miracle of reason in a sea of madness’ (Prunier 2009: 7). However, RPF’s violent approach in dealing with refugee camps both inside and outside the country’s borders (Prunier 2009: Chap.1), their version of ‘victors justice’ (Mamdani 2001: 270; Sebarenzi 2009) and the increasing intolerance to political opposition (ICG 2002) soon led to the collapse of the unity government. The Kibeho massacre in 1995, in which hundreds, probably thousands²⁵, of

²⁰ Who was responsible for this attack is, perhaps with the exception of the RPF killings, the most contested issue related to the genocide. While numerous committees have been set up to establish the truth, who was behind the shooting remains uncertain

²¹ The exact number is hotly debated as it is used for political purposes. Prunier (1995) puts the number at 800 000-850 000, while *Human Rights Watch* and *Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l’Homme* (1999) puts the figure at ‘at least half a million people’

²² The Hutu victims were killed for not complying with orders to kill or for other political reasons. While these were murdered as individuals, the Tutsi was murdered as a group, hence the term *genocide*

²³ Among the best accounts of the genocide is Alison des Forges’ *Leave None To Tell The Story* (1999)

²⁴ It deviated from the Arusha Accords in one important area, namely the establishment of a Vice President post which Paul Kagame assumed alongside being Minister of Defense (Sebarenzi 2009: 138)

²⁵ See Prunier (2009: 41 – 42) for a discussion about the actual number

internally displaced Rwandans were killed by RPF soldiers, and the subsequent resignation of prominent Hutu ministers, spelled the end of the unity government even though it nominally existed for another five years with diminishing credibility until President Bizimungu resigned in 2000 (Prunier 2009: 45)

In the aftermath of the genocide an exodus of millions of Hutu into exile, mainly to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), coupled with the influx of hundreds of thousands Tutsi returnees (Ibid: 3), fundamentally altered Rwanda's demography. The establishment of a permanent security threat across the border in the DRC and the installment of a new power elite in urban centers created the conditions for state formation and completely reconfigured power dynamics in post-genocide Rwanda (Hayman 2009: 52). Tutsi returnees from all over the world were largely middle-class urban dwellers and were frightened by the prospect of settling on one of Rwanda's lawless hills. Scrambling for jobs and homes in urban centers, mainly Kigali, they settled in empty homes and pushed large numbers of the remaining poor Hutu out to the countryside in the process (Prunier 2009: 5).

The divide between the postwar political elite and rural society resulting from this latest round of state building is a key characteristic of state – society relations in contemporary Rwanda. Despite attempts to simultaneously re-engineer rural society by transforming the agricultural sector (Ansoms 2009) and to reconfigure patterns of governance and participation through the decentralisation process, the divide remains significant and perhaps even increasing. As power struggles have recently broken out within the RPF's inner circles (Africa Confidential 2010a), the detachment from rural society risks being aggravated as the regime's survival strategies are more likely to lead it to undertake policies that favor urban areas over the largely rural Hutu areas, whose political support is more difficult to win (Silva-Leander 2008: 1615).

External and internal security threats have been the overriding concern for the postwar political elite. In line with Charles Tilly's classic state formation theory that 'war makes states', the civil war and the ensuing acutely fragile security situation required the regime to maintain a highly disciplined army and promote effective state administration to ensure territorial and societal control (Sundstøl Eriksen 2005). The pace with which strong state institutions were created from scratch was remarkable, and the extent to which these institutions exercise control over Rwanda's territory and society is exceptional in a regional comparative perspective. The strength of the contemporary Rwandan state is best explained

partly by Rwanda's history of a strong, centralised state, and partly by the imperatives of the security situation following the genocide.

3.2.1 The 'Consensual Democracy' model

Coming to power in a context in which the liberal democratic model had reached a global hegemonic status, the RPF quickly committed to the creation of a democratic political system following an initial transition period²⁶ to ensure stability. This new round of state formation coincided with the international community's faith in the so-called transition paradigm, in which states were seen as either heading towards an ideal type liberal democracy or fully authoritarian rule (Carothers 2002). Reyntjens (2006) argue that this optimism is partly to blame for the international community's failure to detect Rwanda's authoritarian drift at the time. With the gradual realisation that a large number of the countries of the third wave of democratisation were in fact not going in any particular direction but rather stranded in a 'grey zone' between democracy and authoritarianism, scholars scrambled to find the appropriate adjectives to describe these new regimes. Both 'politically closed authoritarian' (Hayman 2009: 53) and 'hegemonic electoral authoritarian' (Brown 2011: 3) have been suggested to describe the nature of the current Rwandan regime, while the government sees itself as going through a process of 'democratic consolidation'²⁷.

The nature of Rwanda's conflict gave the postwar political elite a strong sense of the type of political system that it believes Rwanda needs at this stage (Hayman 2009: 54). The effects of the genocide are still being felt by ordinary Rwandans, which by many observers are perceived to still live with what happened as if it was yesterday (Peter & Kibalama 2006: 45). Rwanda's key dilemma, then, is how to build a democracy that can incorporate a *guilty majority*²⁸ alongside an aggrieved and *fearful minority* within a single political community (Mamdani 2001: 266). In trying to reconcile these imperatives, the RPF has constructed a system in which concerns about ethnicity and security underpin a nominally democratic system based on consensus, not competition. The main concepts constituting this peculiar model of 'consensual democracy' are inclusion and consensus-building, which are aimed at

²⁶ The transition period was originally intended to end in 1999 in accordance with the Arusha Accords, the peace agreement between the warring factions from the civil war (1990 – 1994). It was later prolonged with 4 years by the Rwandan parliament (ICG 2002: 2)

²⁷ Identifying the exact position of the current regime on a scale from democratic to totalitarian is not the task of this paper. However, as it is beyond doubt that both relative democratic and authoritarian practices are in play, the term 'hybrid regime' is appropriate to describe the regime

²⁸ As constructed by the RPF version of 'victors justice'

dissipating ethnic tensions and providing security for the country and people, reflecting Rwanda's history with regard to democracy (Hayman 2009: 51, 54).

In 2003 Rwanda adopted a new constitution approved by referendum and held her first presidential elections since the genocide in 1994, signaling the end of the prolonged transition period and a normalising of the political environment. The constitution established key institutions characteristic of liberal democracies such as fundamental freedoms of the people; official separation of powers; independence of the judiciary; and elections to political office at all levels (Ibid). Already formally President since the breakdown of the Government of National Unity in 2000, Paul Kagame won the 2003 presidential elections and assumed the post of President of the Republic for a period of seven years. In August 2010, Kagame was re-elected for a new seven year term with a comfortable 93% of the votes with a voter turnout of 97,5 % (BBC 2010a).

There are a number of areas in which Rwanda's institutions depart from conventional liberal democracies and define Rwanda's model of consensual democracy. The 2003 Constitution dictates a strict power-sharing arrangement for the Cabinet, in which only half of the posts can be filled by representatives of the majority party in parliament. It simultaneously requires all political parties to participate in a *Forum of Political Parties*, which officially aims to promote dialogue and consensus with equal representation between small and large parties. The system for legislative elections aims to ensure that people cannot vote for a candidate purely on the basis of ethnicity or place of origin by restricting the choice to political parties rather than individual candidates (Hayman 2009: 55, 56).

3.3 Civil society in Rwanda

The problems of Rwanda are deeply present in the non State sphere as well: authoritarianism, distrust, clientilism, and exclusion (including the ideology that allowed the genocide to happen) all exist within civil society as well; they are not the sole preserve of government (Uvin 2003: 1)

Rwanda under Habyarimana's Second Republic was usually seen as a model of development in Africa with good performance on most indicators measuring development. The level of civil society activity as understood by donors was no exception, with a high number of NGOs and cooperatives in the country (Uvin 1998: 1). Civil society organisations, in terms of voluntarily civic associations, had since colonial times been generally closely linked with

politics, either working as agents of government or as platforms representing political parties. With structural adjustment and the pressures for political liberalisation from various levels during the early 1990s, this began to change. President Habyarimana was forced to make concessions resulting from a surge in independent civil society activity in this period, which saw the emergence of several new human rights organisations²⁹ in the country (Peter & Kibalama 2006: 68 - 70).

Still, the young human rights movement failed to make its voice heard in the period leading up to the genocide, and as the violence broke out large segments of civil society, including NGOs, the Church and so forth, adhered to genocidal values and participated in the massacres (Uvin 1998: 235). This should serve as a sobering reminder of the fact that divisions in civil society reflect the cleavages and power relations, and in this case the racist ideology, existent in society at large. Moreover, it also informed the postwar political elite's vision of civil society and influenced its approach characterised by restrictive laws and regulations and monitoring of civil society activity.

All social structures, including those of civil society, were either destroyed or left severely damaged by the genocide. Thus, present-day Rwandan civil society is relatively nascent, but nevertheless characterised by a dense network of civil society organisations in the form of NGOs, Community Based Organisations, faith-based organisations, trade unions, cooperatives, youth groups, cultural organisations, and professionalised associations (Peter & Kibalama 2006: 71; 76). Meanwhile, present-day civil society is also characterised by a general passivity to political authority (Foa 2007). While the number of organisations is relatively high, there is relatively little diversity in terms of focus, the vast majority of organisations being small cooperatives³⁰.

The extent to which civil society is structured along ethnic lines is uncertain, mainly due to the government's efforts to suppress the issue of ethnicity. However, there are indications that it is largely divided by ethnopolitical cleavages. The fact finding mission from the Ugandan think tank *Kituo Cha Kabita* (Ibid: 122, 147) found that

²⁹ Most notable the *Ligue Rwandaise Pour La Promotion Et La Défense des Droits De l'Homme* (LIPRDHOR) in 1991, *le Collectif des Ligues et Association de Défense des Droits de l'Homme* (CLADHO) in 1993 and the *Ligue des Droits de la personne dans la Région des Grands Lac* (LDGL), also in 1993

³⁰ Field notes

*the issue of divisionism and the spreading of genocide ideology still abounds. (...)*Rwandan civil society was glaringly split along Tutsi-Hutu lines which apparently also translates as 'pro-government/pro RPF or anti-government'

For instance, *Pro-Femmes*, a major women's umbrella, is considered essentially Tutsi and close to the RPF, while the human rights group LIPRDHOR is considered essentially Hutu, the latter having experienced several confrontations with the RPF regime (Ibid; Reyntjens 2004: 184). Due to these and other divisions, Rwandan civil society is considered by most observers as suffering from a lack of internal solidarity and coherence, leaving it divided and weak in interactions with the state (Peter & Kibalama 2006: 122, 124; Reyntjens 2004: 184).

3.3.1 State – civil society relations

The government's approach towards civil society is guided by a strong desire to prevent political activity, and a number of laws³¹ restricting civil society activity have been put in place to this end. Among these is a laborious NGO registration process, so complex that most existing NGOs in 2004 had not acquired legal status and were operating under provisional agreements, thereby missing the protection of various laws (Peter & Kibalama 2006: 129). In accordance with a 'Guide of Procedural Law' introduced in 2002, all NGOs are required to participate in NGO Forums, feared by civil society representatives to be a tool for government control and monitoring (Ibid: 130). A law introduced in 2001 also gave the government powers to control the management, finances and projects of national and international NGOs, while new legislation is currently in the pipeline (Gready 2010: 641).

Another concern of the government is the extent to which civil society organisations are funded by foreign actors (Peter & Kibalama 2006: 135 – 6). This must be seen partly as a result of government suspicion towards donors and INGOs following their deeply problematic involvement in Rwanda in the aftermath of the genocide³², and the related insistence of the regime to minimise dependence on the outside world.

Government interference in civil society activity is common and well-documented. Examples of this include using the *Platform for Civil Society* as an avenue to tighten control over civil society, and the repeated attacks on the human rights group LDGL, the leader of which fled

³¹ For a review of these laws and their impact on civil society activity, see *World Movement for Democracy: (2008) Defending Civil Society*, Rwanda report

³² For accounts on this, see Gourewitch (1998) and Prunier (2009)

into exile after criticising the government in 2003 (Ibid: 99, 100). The various umbrella structures, which organise civil society organisations thematically, are widely perceived to have been co-opted by government and to serve as ‘monitoring and control devices’ (Gready 2010: 642).

The most serious onslaught on civil society to date took place in 2004 when the Rwandan parliament accepted a Parliamentary Commission’s recommendation to dissolve a number of civil society organisations (among them LIPRODHOR) due to their ‘spreading of genocidal ideology’ (Amnesty International 2004a). The conclusion was reached despite the absence of an official definition of the term ‘divisionism’ (Peter & Kibalama 2006: 150). The incident sparked international outcry and is widely considered as a turning point for civil society in post-genocide Rwanda as it confirmed the government’s will and capacity to crack down on independent civil society organisations. It furthermore emphasised the threat posed by the law on divisionism³³ as a Damocles’ sword hanging over civil society activists’ heads, as the law is ‘shrouded in uncertainty and prone to be used repressively’ (Ibid: 155).

3.4 Development aid to Rwanda

Rwanda is heavily aid dependent, relying on relatively few³⁴ but significant donors³⁵.

According to the OECD, net official development assistance to Rwanda in 2006 was USD 585 million, amounting to approximately 50 percent of the government budget (Beswick 2010: 230). The lion’s share of aid inflows to Rwanda comes in the form of either general or sector budget support, with the former increasing dramatically to USD 213 million in 2008 (Hayman 2009: 65). Rwanda has been a pilot country for this fairly new aid modality, with the United Kingdom’s (UK) Department for International Development (DfID) the largest provider. Providers of General Budget Support (GBS) typically claim to gain influence over policies as a result of the support³⁶. While this is arguably often the case in other contexts, the Rwandan government seems to gain comparatively much power from the GBS, partly because ‘no one in annual monitoring exercises wants to rock the boat and undermine the nice

³³ On accusations of divisionism and genocide ideology between 2003 and 2008, see Human Rights Watch (2008): ‘Law and Reality: progress in judicial reform in Rwanda’

³⁴ The most significant donors include the World Bank, the European Union, the African Development Bank, USA, United Kingdom, Canada, Sweden, Japan, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands.

³⁵ I prefer the more accurate word ‘donor’ to the fashionable ‘partner’

³⁶ It is paradoxical how providers of general budget support claim that the modality gives them increased influence *and* increased ownership by the recipient government. Given that influence over policy is necessarily a zero-sum game, it is difficult to see how two actors can simultaneously gain more of it

setup' (Uvin 2004: 116-7). Relative to other aid dependent countries, Rwanda retains considerable control over development policies and how the money is spent. Whitfield (2008) characterises Rwanda's control over policy as 'medium' despite high aid dependence, while Hayman (2009) views Rwandan ownership of aid strategies as 'strong'.

Despite the relative 'clean aid' to Rwanda as discussed above, there are some significant dynamics in play that dictates the form of aid to Rwanda. Most evident is the link between the generous budget support from the UK and Rwanda's disengagement with *Francafrique*³⁷ and gradual entry into the British sphere of influence in Africa³⁸. The UK clearly stands out as Rwanda's least critical donor, even going a long way in refuting claims in a critical Commonwealth Human Rights Commission documenting human rights abuses³⁹. The general mood among other donors in Kigali is that the UK is 'very comfortable with the current state of affairs'⁴⁰.

Another important factor shaping government – donor relations is the so-called 'genocide credit' exploited by Kigali to raise donors' threshold to criticise governance issues.

Reminiscent of the strategy deployed by Israel;

*The RPF regime uses the unfortunate role played before and during the genocide by some international actors (...) to justify some of their abuses. (...) The international community (The United Nations) failed terribly in its mandate and mission with regard to the appeal for protection for the most fundamental human rights before, during and after the genocide. The RPF regime continues to use this failure and most donors will still seem to feel guilty about not having intervened*⁴¹ (Kimony in Peter & Kibalama 2006: 141)

USA, along with the UK, have been criticised by the Belgians⁴² for not airing governance concerns in their dialogue with the government, but appear to give such concerns increasing attention. For instance, they note the 'issues of media freedom, concentration of political power and need for increased political space' in a recent update of their country program website (USAID a). In a notable event that might signal a departure from earlier apologetic

³⁷ The term for France's close relationship with francophone Africa

³⁸ Since RPF came to power, they have changed the country's official language from French to English and joined the Commonwealth of Nations

³⁹ The British Ambassador to Rwanda, Richard Cannon, claimed that the authors of the report had 'limited experience of Rwanda', and that the criticisms raised were 'either unfair or some of them applied to earlier stages in Rwanda's history' (<http://allafrica.com/stories/200911260544.html>)

⁴⁰ Field notes

⁴¹ Kimony in Peter & Kibalama 2006: 141

⁴² Field notes

positions, top American diplomat Johnny Carson in 2010 warned that the Rwandan government was tightening political expression and criticised the arrest of opposition politician Victoire Ingabire (Daily Nation a).

Among the few instances of donors resorting to punitive measures given Rwanda's repeated military interventions in the DRC and domestic human rights abuses, is the freeze of budget support by Sweden and the Netherlands following a 2008 UN report documenting Rwanda's role in the war in DRC (Reuters 2008a). Still, the Dutch have since resumed their budget support, and Swedish aid to Rwanda remains at its previous levels despite the cut in direct budget support. The broad picture is thus that the donors seem to accept the general direction in which Rwanda is going (Hayman 2009). Donors tend to give Kigali the benefit of the doubt, and recently committed to increasing general budget support by a formidable 66 % by 2013 (New Times 2010a).

3.4.1 Donors and civil society

Civil society is an analytical ambiguous concept, and a large amount of academic literature is dedicated to dwell on definitions and meanings of the term. However, while the abstract problem of how to define civil society remains a source of debate among academics, civil society is being defined in practice by the policies of aid agencies⁴³, by the governments of recipient countries and by civil society organisations themselves (Ottaway 2008: 170). In general, when foreign donors refer to civil society they are alluding to a very narrow, specific section of it. As Carothers (1997: 114) notes, civil society assistance is potentially all-embracing given that civil society constitutes the whole range of intermediary associations, from kinship organisations to social-service-oriented NGOs. However, drawing on US experience, which he suggests is 'not fundamentally different from that of other donors and as such constitutes a useful entry point', he explains (Ibid):

The single most favored area of US civil society assistance is that of advocacy NGOs, such as human rights groups, election monitoring organisations (...) the crucial feature that distinguishes such organisations (...) is that they seek to influence governmental policy on some specific set of issues

As in many developing countries where local civil society groups, especially those engaged in advocacy and human rights work, could not function without financial and political support

⁴³Of the six donors I interviewed in Kigali, none could offer an operative definition of civil society

from external actors (Hayman 2009: 72), most NGOs in Rwanda are fully dependent on foreign funding (Peter & Kibalama 2006: 136). Democracy assistance programs in Rwanda to a large extent benefit NGOs of the type described above, consisting of a rather small number of urban-based, often human rights, organisations with a middle class leadership⁴⁴, though a few donors, especially INGOs, do give priority to organisations with rural links. This pattern resembles the findings from an investigation into donors' civil society support in South Africa, Uganda and Ghana (Hearn 1997).

While emergency and reconstruction needs were the focus of aid activities until the late 1990s, promotion of democracy has been an issue of concern to donors throughout the postwar period. Support for civil society and the media increased in the beginning of the millennia, many bilateral donors have recently incorporated specific 'democracy' elements into their programs (Hayman: 64, 66-7). However, Rwanda's donors address the country's democratic deficit in inconsistent ways and with varying enthusiasm when dealing directly with the government (Ibid; Prunier 2009; Reyntjens 2011). This is partly the result of the dilemma faced by many donors to reconcile the need to compensate for the lack of the support during the conflict and the continued incidents of human rights abuses and stalling democratisation by the new regime. The outcome has been statements about the need to address democracy at international meetings and rhetoric in civil society support programs but little real application of conditions (Hayman 2009: 70).

Providers of GBS typically include a minimum of civil society support in their country programs, based on a notion that civil society should be compensated for the donors' assistance to the state, thereby 'balancing' the power between the state and societal forces⁴⁵. However, the money allocated to civil society support amounts to only a small fraction compared to the GBS, strengthening the state on the expense of civil society.

Donor support to civil society is provided for a wide range of purposes, most of which can be categorised as either developmentalist purposes of improving socioeconomic outcomes or for purposes of democratisation. However, fuelling citizen demand for better governance and fostering greater citizen participation end up overlapping considerably in practice, despite the differing labels (Carothers 2010: 23). Additionally, most donors adhere to the notion that civil

⁴⁴ Field notes

⁴⁵ Field notes. This was also the prevailing argument among donors of budget support I spoke with in Mozambique, another recipient of large amounts of general budget support.
<http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/14/56/21/6ddf8a90.pdf>

society activity *per se* is conducive to democratisation, as it is expected to generate social capital, organisational pluralism and a democratic culture.

4 The liberal view

This section concerns the assumptions of the liberal view of civil society and democratisation, and will be illustrated by donors' policies' and political analysis of contemporary Rwandan politics and relative democratic deficit. While civil society are attributed a wide range of functions conducive to democratisation in the liberal tradition, White (1996: 185-9) suggests four main areas: i) altering the balance of power between state and society; ii) improving the accountability of both politicians and administrators; iii) acting as an intermediary between state and society; and iv) legitimating the political system by promoting the values of liberal democracy. In the following analysis, points ii) and iii) are particularly evident in donor interventions in Rwanda.

4.1 Donors' analysis: the Rwandan success story

One of the most striking features of representations of contemporary Rwanda is the extremely polarised nature of the debate. Representations can be categorised in two broad categories, which I will refer to as the 'success story narrative' and the 'authoritarianism narrative'.

In their various strategy papers, Rwanda's donors tend to invoke the success story narrative by focusing on Rwanda's remarkable progress in terms of traditional development indicators such as economic growth, improved infrastructure, food security and basic service delivery since 1994, when, according to the World Bank, Rwanda was the poorest country on earth (Meredith 2005: 523). Under President Kagame's leadership⁴⁶ Rwanda has become a 'donor darling' of the West⁴⁷, attracting large amounts of development aid from bilateral donors, International Financial Institutions and INGOs. Rwanda is commonly referred to as an 'African success story'⁴⁸, and Kagame's admirers include high-profile personalities like Tony Blair and Bill Clinton⁴⁹.

⁴⁶ Kagame's rule is highly personalised. In the words of Kinzer (2008: 333-335), he 'dominates the political scene and has absolute control over the military. (...). From lowly sub-mayors to generals and Supreme Court justices, officials in Rwanda tremble at the prospect of his wrath. (...) President Kagame can be as powerful as he wants'

⁴⁷ See Cassimon (2006) *The aid 'darlings' and 'orphans' of the Great Lakes Region in Africa*

⁴⁸ For example, *Time Magazine* contributing editor and foreign affair analyst Fareed Zakaria recently called Rwanda 'Africa's biggest success story' (<http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/africa/07/17/zakaria.rwanda/>)

⁴⁹ Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair serves as an unpaid adviser to Kagame, while former American President Bill Clinton awarded Kagame the *Clinton Global Citizen Award* in 2009 for his 'commitment to leadership in Public Service'

Donors are impressed by what is considered the good governance practiced by the Rwandan authorities, seen in the form of liberal and disciplined macroeconomic policies, effective state administration, relatively low levels of corruption, decentralisation programs and the apparent transformation of Rwanda into an African developmental state modeled on the East Asian Tigers. Kagame is seen as personally ‘obsessed’ with pulling Rwanda out of poverty (Kinzer 2008: 227; 325), and the stated ambition in the government's development strategy, the *Vision 2020*, is to transform Rwanda into a middle-income country by 2020 (GoR 2000a). Campaigning for the presidential elections in 2010, Kagame’s main message was that ‘good politics is about development’ (New Times b).

To the extent that democratic legitimacy is claimed within the success story narrative, it is primarily in relation to the various elections held since the transition period ended in 2003. However, the need for more democracy is often downplayed by aid officials who view Paul Kagame as a benevolent autocrat working for the best for all Rwandans in a context in which political liberalisation could set in motion dangerous processes. They thereby largely accept the government’s discourse on development and democratisation which entails equating good governance with democracy. As former British ambassador to Rwanda Jeremy Macadie states in Kinzer (2008: 327):

If you apply general Western standards (...) it isn't a democracy. If, on the other hand, you ask, 'Is this government working for the benefit of the general population? Is it working to assure that people have enough to eat? Does it have a vision to lift this country out of poverty?' – Then the answer is yes. It's the definition of democracy that's critical

The general rule in donors’ analysis of Rwanda is to praise the government for the remarkable progress since the genocide and transformation into among ‘the best [countries] of Africa in many respects’ (NPA 2009a: 21) while avoiding contentious political issues. When the issue of Rwanda’s democratic credentials do arise, it is typically brought up in relation to civil society support programs. Despite the internal differences explored above, there is a discernable commonality in the various donors’ assessments of the relative democratic nature of the current regime. It should however be emphasised that especially the USA seems to be increasingly vocal on governance issues. This is partly reflected in their activities in Rwanda which include political party and parliament strengthening programs. With this caveat in mind, the following views are common among Rwanda’s largest donors.

According to the common view, Rwanda is currently going through a process of democratisation⁵⁰. In this context, efforts are needed to ‘further deepen the democratisation process’ (UNDP 2007: 4), and to ‘consolidate and advance democracy’ (NPA 2009: 21). The basis for this claim is in large part the various local, parliamentary and presidential elections held since 2003, in line with government rhetoric. Typical of this representation, Paul Kagame recently stated in an interview that Rwanda ‘continue[s] democratising and consolidating the gains of the democratisation process’, with reference to elections at different levels (The East African 2009a). While acknowledging flaws in the run-up to elections and the lack of a balanced playing field between equal actors, most aid officials in Kigali nevertheless focus on the performance on election day when assessing elections (Brown 2011: 5).

4.2 The role of civil society

4.2.1 Citizens’ ‘voice’ and policy influence

Another frequently cited indication of an ongoing democratisation process are the ‘news spaces for people’s participation at a local level’ opened up by the government through the ongoing decentralisation process (Norad 2006a). These new spaces are presented as arenas for policy influence, and are regarded as a crucial area for civil society to act as an intermediary between the state and society in line with liberal assumptions. In the context of self-alleged government efforts to promote increased citizen participation, however, donors are concerned that Rwandan civil society is currently not seizing the opportunity to participate in policy formulation, thereby failing to assume its natural role as intermediaries.

This failure is perceived by donors to be due to civil society’s general lack of capacity (Peter & Kibalama 2006: 138). INGO Norwegian People’s Aid identifies the ‘weak position and capacity of civil society’ as ‘the main challenge’ for democratic governance (Norad 2006). UNDP (2007: 4; 72) emphasises the need to ‘further deepen the democratisation process by strengthening civil society’, but notes that Rwandan civil society is currently ‘extremely weak’.

⁵⁰ This is backed by findings from my fieldwork. Five out of six donors asserted that there was currently a process of democratisation in Rwanda

Focusing on this lack of ‘voice’, and particularly in local political structures, donors regularly cite Rwanda’s poor performance on the *Voice and Accountability Index* (Ibid: 71) as the core challenge for further democratisation. The task of the donors in this context, then, is to equip and enable civil society organisations to exploit the new spaces for participation and to get on board in the ongoing democratisation process. A recently initiated civil society strengthening program funded primarily by the Swedish Development Agency (SIDA) under its Democratic Governance⁵¹ program and partly by DfID, is instructive to this line of thought. The project arises out the (NPA 2009a: 4)

prevailing concern that Rwandan civil society and citizens are not interested, knowledgeable or organised enough to engage actively and effectively in public policy dialogue and in monitoring and informing the use of public resources (...)

In order to remedy this problem, the project sets out to (Ibid)

(...) strengthen Rwanda’s civil society and citizenry by improving their interest, skills and levels of organisation and participation in these processes [of policy formulation, implementation and management] at both national and local level

Civil society’s role in informing and influencing policy is essential in the eyes of donors, and is perceived by US aid officials, according to Carothers (1997: 114), as the very crux of the pro-democratic function of civil society. Civil society participation in formal structures, such as hearings and consultations, as well as more informal arenas such as lobbying and campaigns, is considered to enhance the democratic legitimacy of policies as more voices are heard in the policy formulation processes. The lack of such civil society participation and influence in policy-making processes is identified as one of the main challenges for democratisation and governance by USAID, which list promoting democracy as one of the main strategic objectives in Rwanda. A recent program, entitled ‘Democracy and Good Governance’ (2004 – 2008), states that the strengthening of civil society and local participation are instrumental: ‘USAID will continue to support Rwanda’s (...) civil society organizations increase citizen participation in local and national government decision-making’ (USAIB b).

A textbook example of how civil society participation in decision-making processes is considered to increase democratic legitimacy is the World Bank’s emphasis on ‘civil society

⁵¹ UNDP was the first institution with a ‘democratic governance’ program (in contrast to ‘good governance’ programs), in what may be the beginning of a trend towards greater alignment of development and democracy promotion agendas (Carothers 2010)

consultations’ in the formulation of Rwanda’s latest strategy for poverty reduction, the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS⁵²) (World Bank a). The strategy lays out important development policies and priorities for Rwanda, formulated by the Government in accordance with experts from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. By including civil society consultations and so-called ‘participation at grass-root level’, the democratic legitimacy of the decision-making process and by extension the policies are secured’. Consulting civil society organisations in formulating the strategy ensures, according to the World Bank, that voice is given ‘to poor and excluded [people], who are represented by civil society organisations’ (Ibid.). This expectation that civil society organisations are to give the poor ‘voice’ is echoed in a DfID White Paper (in Beswick 2010: 232): ‘civil society organisations give citizens power, help poor people get their voices heard, and demand more from politicians and government’.

Thus, the lack of Rwandan’s citizenry and civil society’s ‘interest, knowledge and level of organisation’ is presented as the chief obstacle to further democratisation, while the discussion about political structures is largely limited to a praising of decentralisation and the opportunities offered under it. The picture that emerges is one in which Rwandan citizens, provided with some guidance by international donors, are free to organise in civil society and demand accountability from an ostensibly benevolent state power and influence public policies that affect them.

4.2.2 Accountability

As demonstrated above, the role of civil society to increase accountability to politicians and administrators is considered among its main virtues in its contribution to democratisation. In their Rwanda strategy, DfID include support to civil society to ‘supplement’ the budget support with the aim of ‘increasing accountability’. The Rwanda Country Plan 2008 – 2012 (DfID a) states that DfID seeks to build a state that uses ‘democratic systems and civil society organisations to make sure that the Government of Rwanda is accountable to its people’. Given the UK’s satisfaction with the current leadership and their approval of the post-transition period elections, it is unclear what is meant by the vague term ‘democratic systems’. What is clear is that civil society organisations are considered key to holding the political leadership accountable in present-day Rwanda. Similarly, SIDA, in new fresh

⁵² The EDPRS is the second such strategy under the ‘Vision 2020’, and is valid for the period 2008 - 2012

Country Strategy, states that ‘Support is to be provided to civil society to strengthen their ability to demand accountability and transparency from the Government’ (SIDA a). Again, by presenting civil society capacity as the chief obstacle to democratisation and omitting the discussion about the political context, we are presented with the notion that increased accountability is something that is there to claim for citizens and civil society organisations provided external support.

Increasing the government’s accountability to citizens is also identified as the key challenge to democratic governance in a joint exercise between the government and its donors to agree on a common platform for future collaboration. Fundamentally positive to Rwanda’s ‘good governance’ and strong institutions, the Joint Governance Assessment (JGA) report nevertheless points to the lack of citizen participation and accountability as the main challenge to more democratic governance in Rwanda (GoR 2008a: 17);

A major challenge will be to strengthen forms of state-society interaction that generate accountability from government towards citizens. In order to achieve this, it is particularly important to find ways to strengthen mechanisms for aggregating and channeling interests from the grassroots. (...) As mechanisms of vertical accountability, this report also emphasises the importance of strengthening the role of civil society, private sector and the media in scrutinising government performance, providing policy feedback and recommendations, and advocating change

The document gives insight into the level of consensus between the government and the donors in their political analysis of Rwanda. The report is dominated by the success story narrative, concluding with an overall ‘positive view of the progress that has been made [since the genocide] in strengthening governance (Ibid: 78). The report also clearly displays the government’s reluctance to be subject to independent political analysis. Among the report’s objectives are to (Ibid: 3):

i) develop a common (government and donors) understanding of governance issues in Rwanda; [and] ii) reduce transaction costs by consolidating different donor governance assessment activities

Reducing ‘transaction costs’ in this respect translates into an overall reduction of the amount of governance assessment activities. Moreover, by agreeing on a common platform for governance, donors’ threshold to address governance issues is likely to be raised.

4.2.3 Local participation

Increased civil society and citizen participation at a local level is increasingly seen as another essential arena to further the democratisation process, both in the liberal discourse and among actors from other political backgrounds (Harris et al. 2004: 1). The German Development Service (DED) lists promoting democracy as one out of three strategic objectives in their engagement with Rwanda. Promoting democracy will, according to the Germans, be achieved through ‘the improvement of the capacity of the local government units’ to facilitate the ‘participation of the population in decision making and local development processes’, and ‘improv[ing] the capacity of civil society organisations to participate actively in the social and economical development process’ (DED a). The picture that emerges, then, is again that lack of capacity is responsible for a low level of citizens’ input and influence over public policies. Through workshops and financial and technical assistance, German development aid will contribute to closing the gap between citizens and supposedly benevolent local government units.

Again, there is a confluence of donor and government views on Rwanda’s democratic deficit with regards to citizens’ participation in local political structures. The government’s development strategy *Vision 2020* (GoR 2000: 12), states that;

[p]eople’s participation at the grassroots level will be promoted through the decentralisation process, whereby local communities will be empowered in the decision-making process, enabling them to address the issues that affect them the most

4.3 Summary

The liberal view applies a *society-centered* analysis of Rwandan state – society relations and concludes that civil society capacity, rather than political structures, is at the heart of Rwanda’s democratic deficit. The above analysis is also fundamentally *a-political*, presenting the notion of a country characterised by an apparent lack of political tension and competition for power. Neglecting the issue of power relations within civil society, it is presented as a neutral arena in which all citizens (and explicitly ‘the poor’) are free to participate in decision-making, yield influence on policies and demand accountability in an equal matter. In this context, largely devoid of politics and power, donors will contribute to democratisation by providing economic and technical assistance to Rwandan civil society so that it can assume its natural role as a watchdog on state power.

As demonstrated above, this analysis is largely shared by the government. The convergence of donor and government views on Rwanda's democratic deficit is significant and arguably reveals the limitations of the type of democratisation that is expected to result from civil society participation in government-defined arenas. Given the premise that incumbents always strive to remain in power, donor efforts to promote democratisation in Rwanda, and by extension the form of democratisation it propagates, do not appear to threaten the position of the present power-holders.

In sum, then, the donor diagnosis of democracy's state of affairs in Rwanda concludes with the following:

- There is a currently a process of democratisation in Rwanda, partly manifested in new arenas for participation. However, civil society organisations are not exploiting these new spaces and opportunities to influence policy and demand accountability from government
- This is due to a lack of *capacity* (understood in terms of knowledge, level of organisation and material resources) among Rwandan civil society organisations, which keeps civil society from fulfilling its role as a watchdog that holds authorities accountable for policies and conduct
- There is a need for increased citizen participation on a local level so that citizens can address the issues that affect them the most in local political structures

5 The authoritarian structures view

The conventional view about Rwanda's democratic deficit strongly contrasts with the donors' analysis presented above. Rather than pointing to civil society's lack of capacity to assume their natural role as watchdogs, the prevailing view is that political authoritarian structures are at the heart of the country's democratic deficit. The vast majority of scholars⁵³, think tanks and human rights groups identify the hegemonic position and authoritarian practices of the ruling party RPF as the main obstacle to a more democratic Rwanda. Long-time Rwanda experts and respected scholars such as Gérard Prunier, Réne Lemarchand and the late Alison des Forges⁵⁴ are among the regime's most fierce critics, describing the RPF regime as fundamentally repressive.

According to its critics, the regime has a fundamentally paternalistic attitude towards the population, seeing its role as nurturing notions of responsibility and accountability within a populace that once associated, and may continue to associate, democracy with ethnic discrimination, majority rule, and violence (Hayman 2009: 74). Within this narrative, human rights, justice and democracy are sacrificed by the RPF in the pursuit of development as a means of legitimising its rule. 'Development is on top of the list', argued Rwanda expert and human rights activist Alison Des Forges, while 'Justice is not on top of their list. (...) (...) justice is seen as a nuisance' (Kinzer 2008: 330).

5.1 Current political development

In contrast to the donors' assertion that Rwanda is democratising, scholars tend to emphasise the authoritarian nature of the regime. It is commonly accepted among scholars that the RPF used the extension of the transition period, which was prolonged from 1999 to 2003, to further concentrate political power (Reyntjens 2006). International Crisis Group described these years as marked by a 'hazardous authoritarian drift' (ICG 2002: 10).

⁵³Reyntjens (2011: 2) claims that 'there is consensus in the international scholarly community that Rwanda is run by a dictatorship'. Though this is an exaggeration, practically all scholars writing about Rwanda agree that the country is *de-facto* a one-party state

⁵⁴ One of very few outside observers to have spoken *Kinyarwanda*

While there is less consensus about the current political trend, most scholars perceive a further narrowing down on political space⁵⁵ in Rwanda (Beswick 2010: 227). Many observers regarded the run-up to the 2010 presidential elections as a further tightening of the political system. Washington-based *Freedom House* observed a ‘decline’ in freedom in 2010 (Freedom House 2011a), and the well-known supporter and biographer of Paul Kagame, Steven Kinzer, departed from his earlier position and warned that Kagame’s ‘authoritarian turn’ might contribute to destabilise Rwanda (Guardian 2011a). Similarly, a recent Bertelsmaan Foundation Rwanda Country Report concluded that Rwanda *strengthened* its authoritarian development strategy in the period 2008 – 2010. It furthermore noted that ‘Rwanda is not and has never been a democracy. (...) In reality, Rwanda’s citizens cannot choose their leaders. (...) The people’s participation is reduced to façade elections’ (Bertelsmaan 2010a).

Despite providing the basis for the regime and its supporters’ discourse of democratisation, critics describe Rwanda’s post-transition parliamentary (2003; 2008) and presidential (2003; 2010) elections as facades and mere formalities (Ibid; Eurac 2010; Reyntjens 2011). After the 2003 general elections the EU observers arrived at the paradoxical conclusion that political pluralism had shrunk since during the transition period (Reyntjens 2004: 1109). Potentially genuine contesters to Paul Kagame and the RPF, critics argue, are routinely banned from participating in elections, and the playing field among the actual contenders is heavily tipped RPF’s way by virtue of controlling the state apparatus and patronage. Thus, while donors tend to focus on the relative successful procedures on election day, Brown (2011: 5) points to the fact that no matter how impeccable the voting procedure, the count and the reporting of results, an election may fail the fairness test before voting even begins. Elections, then, are perceived by critics to serve a legitimising function for the regime rather than constituting a step towards democracy.

In local elections, also frequently invoked by the government as evidence of the democratic nature of present-day Rwanda, voters have been required to provide their thumb-print on the ballot⁵⁶ or queue behind their preferred candidate, as was the case in the recent local elections at cell level in February 2011 (NPA 2011a). Both of these practices disregard the democratic principle of the secret vote.

⁵⁵ Understood as the ability of actors other than the government to critically engage in debate on government policy and practice

⁵⁶ As Reyntjens (2004) notes, the thumb-print is widely regarded as the equivalent to a person’s signature in Rwanda

5.2 Obstacles to democratisation

5.2.1 Denial of civil and political rights

A frequent claim made by proponents of this view is that the civil and political rights formally guaranteed in the 2003 Constitution are not respected in reality. Human rights groups such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the regional umbrella *La Ligue des Droits de la personne dans la region des Grands Lacs* (LDGL) regularly publish reports denouncing the lack of basic civil and political rights in the country. While LDGL remain one of very few remaining independent human rights organisations in Rwanda, Human Rights Watch is banned from operating in the country following a prolonged and bitter conflict with the regime (Human Rights Watch 2011a).

Rwanda scores poorly on the various indexes measuring degrees of different forms of freedoms. Freedom House has ranked the country as ‘not free’ in every consecutive year since the transition period ended in 2003, with the political score for 2010 being 6 on a scale from 1 to 7 where the latter is the lowest possible level of freedom (Freedom House 2010a). Also in 2010, Rwanda was ranked in 168th place out of 178 countries in the *Reporters without Borders*’ 2010 Press Freedom Index (Reporters without Borders 2011a).

Similar claims are being made by less activist bodies mandated by international institutions like the UN, the African Union (AU) and the Commonwealth of Nations. A major 2007 United Nations Development Program (UNDP 2007: 71) report lamented the ‘low levels of political freedom’ in the country⁵⁷, and the African Peer Review Mechanism⁵⁸ (APRM) concluded in their assessment of Rwanda in 2006 that ‘the existence of core aspects of democracy and political freedoms were not visible’ and that political participation appeared ‘rehearsed’ (Ibid: 72). In their assessment of democracy and human rights in Rwanda following the country’s application for membership in the Commonwealth in 2010, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative concluded that Rwanda’s constitution is used as a façade to hide ‘the repressive nature of the regime’ (Independent 2009a). Unsurprisingly, Rwanda was duly admitted as a new member.

⁵⁷This report provides an insight into the regime’s lack of tolerance to criticism. Having written the introduction to the largely positive report praising Rwanda’s progress, Minister James Musoni regretted having endorsed the report because of a few critical remarks. Claiming not to have read the final edit, Musoni publicly denounced it and blacklisted the Swedish author

⁵⁸The APRM is a self-monitoring mechanism, voluntarily acceded to by the member states of the AU

5.2.2 Manipulation of institutions

Critics hold that nominally independent state institutions and other political parties remain operating on the mercy of the RPF, which skillfully applies a combination of constitution engineering, ambiguous law formulation and enforcement, and outright intimidation and violence to keep opposition in place. The judiciary is seen as largely under the control of the RPF (Sebarenzi 2009: 151 – 2) and used to control opposition through the application of the ill-defined law against ‘divisionism’ and ‘genocidal ideology’, the latter paragraph added in 2008 (Eurac 2011a: 3). The law is ‘shrouded in uncertainty and prone to be used repressively’ (Peter & Kibalama 2006: 155), and regularly used to silence critics, dissolve civil society organisations⁵⁹, shut down independent media and to imprison journalists.

Parliament, as in most hybrid regimes, is seen by the regime’s critics as a mostly ceremonial and cosmetic affair without real powers. Repeated attempts to strengthen its position vis-à-vis the towering executive have been foiled. The most serious attempt by parliament to claim more power, including the right to supervise ministers, led to the exile of then Speaker of Parliament, Joseph Sebarenzi (Sebarenzi 2009).

The Forum of Political parties is commonly regarded as an arena for keeping other parties in line with RPF policies and views, serving simultaneously to prevent independent action by parliament and to disarm opposition parties (Sebarenzi 2009; Hayman 2009: 55). Though present, opposition parties are insignificant and with hardly any chances of influencing the politics of the country (Peter & Kibalama 2006: 10). Parties that the RPF consider a potential threat are routinely dissolved or not allowed to register. In 2003 the *Mouvement Démocratique Républicain* (MDR), the only other political party with popular support and genuine challenger to the RPF before the general elections, was dissolved and declared illegal (Reyntjens 2004: 184). In the run-up to the 2010 presidential election, several political parties were denied to present a candidate, leaving the re-election of Paul Kagame a ‘mere formality’ (Eurac 2011a: 1). Illustrative of the servility of the political parties that were allowed to register and run, their representatives ‘joined in the celebration’ of the announcement of Kagame’s candidacy at the RPF Convention leading up to the election because of the ‘infectious mood’ at the gathering (New Times 2010c).

⁵⁹Recall the 2004 parliamentary report as discussed in Chapter 3

Conditions for independent media have been difficult in post-genocide Rwanda, due to a mixture of government harassment and lack of resources. Recent events delivered fatal blows for the remains of Rwanda's independent media, with the assassination of journalist Jean-Léonard Rugambage in 2010, a ban on the newspapers *Umuwugizi* and *Umuseso*⁶⁰, and the recent sentencing of two journalists to 7 and 17 years of prison for spreading divisionism (Eurac 2011a: 3).

The RPF has a long track record with intimidation and violence against critics of the regime⁶¹. Notable incidents include the likely responsibility for the assassination of former minister Seth Sethasonga in Nairobi (Prunier 2009: Appendix 1) and the plot to assassinate Joseph Sebarenzi, at the time the Speaker of Parliament, who fled into exile in 2000 (Sebarenzi 2009). Despite the declining frequency of politically motivated violence since the turn of the millennia, the murder of one journalist and the Vice-President of the Green Party, in addition to the assassination attempt of a renegade military officer in Johannesburg, left the 2010 presidential elections with a backdrop of violence and a reminder that the threat remains real (Eurac 2011a: 2). The RPF denies any responsibility for these incidents, though it seems likely that the power apparatus played a role in at least some of these incidents.

5.2.3 Elite detachment

The postwar political elite is widely regarded as being disconnected from the majority of Rwandans in terms of various identity markers. The post-1994 political elite consist largely of Tutsi returnees from Uganda - the core of the RPF - and other countries who have settled in urban centers, primarily Kigali. This group has few links to rural society and the peasant way of life, and thus differ profoundly both ethnically and spatially from that of the overall majority of the population (Ansoms 2009: 4). Political activity is largely an urban affair, with the few political parties allowed and the large majority of donors' favored civil society organisations located in Kigali. It is illustrative that a number of local mayors reside in the capital and commute to their constituencies⁶².

Key characteristics and differences between the postwar political elite and the majority of Rwandans include ethnic (Tutsi – Hutu), spatial (urban – rural), occupational (civil servants

⁶⁰The ban was recently lifted. However, the editors of the journals remain in exile

⁶¹ For a long list of critics that have either fled or been assassinated since the RPF came to power, including large numbers of Tutsi, see Reyntjens 2011

⁶² Field notes

and other – small-scale peasants), income level (high/medium – low) and language (English - French). This detachment has led the most radical critics of the regime to conclude that the RPF is deliberately concentrating power in the hands of a small Tutsi⁶³ elite, the ‘Tutsification’ of power thesis (Reyntjens 2004; Pruner 2009; Gready 2010: 639). Proponents of this view regard the current regime as nothing but a continuation of Rwanda’s eternal cycle of ethnic dictatorships replacing each other through cataclysms of mass violence⁶⁴.

With this backdrop, many proponents of the authoritarian structures view regard the decentralisation process as an attempt by the regime to further their control over rural society rather than decentralising power, thereby preempting a potential source of opposition to their rule. The new spaces for participation, so much applauded by the donors, are seen in this narrative as purely rhetorical, as alternative political views are not tolerated at any level by the regime.

5.3 Implications for civil society agency

Adherents to this line of analysis hold that civil society is unable to play a constructive role in promoting democratisation mainly because of government interference on different levels. Well-documented government efforts to disarm civil society organisations include installing RPF cadres in leadership positions in key organisations (Reyntjens 2004: 1107), and to instill fear and self-censorship by accusing civil society organisations that ‘go political’ of spreading genocidal ideology. The culture of self-censorship and fear of interfering in politics among civil society activists is well documented (Beswick 2010: 248; Foa 2007; Peter & Kibalama 2006: 162)⁶⁵.

The government is keenly observing whether civil society organisations comply with their vision of civil society’s correct role in Rwanda’s development. Rather than the role of watchdog on government conduct and influencing policy, the government sees the role of civil society as purely one of service delivery and implementer of its policies. As long as civil society organisations stick with this role, they have played a useful role for the RPF in demonstrating that the regime is not in principle opposed to an active civil society (Beswick

⁶³ Or rather a sub-group of Tutsi, specifically a small clique of Anglophone former refugees from Uganda

⁶⁴ Philip Reyntjens is arguably the most explicit formulator of this view, with Prunier, Sebarenzi, Rusesabagina have also stated similar arguments

⁶⁵ This point was also frequently made during my interviews in Kigali

2010: 248). Addressing an international conference in Kigali just days before the 2004 parliamentary report denouncing major civil society organisations for spreading genocidal ideology, then Minister of State for Good Governance, Protais Musoni, summarised the government's line (Peter & Kibalama 2006: 66);

There are two debates on the role of the civil society organisations in developing countries by international scholars. On one side civil society is seen as a counter power to government, and on the other civil society is seen as an effective partner in the service delivery and development process. Rwanda favors the latter approach

The same view was repeated years later by former Secretary General at the Ministry of Justice, Johnston Busingye; 'When civil society sees itself as something different to government, as almost opposed, then it is a problem' (Gready 2010: 641). As demonstrated above, the government possesses both the will and capacity to force this vision of civil society organisations that are out of line.

5.4 Summary

In contrast to the donors' view, the conventional view of Rwanda's democratic deficit is based on a *state-centered* analysis. It is concerned with how the RPF is manipulating the institutional framework familiar from liberal democracies, rather than offering a critique of the political model and its implications *per se*. Despite presiding over a 'hybrid regime' combining authoritarian practices with a democratic institutional framework, the RPF is seen as exercising complete control over the state apparatus and society, almost to a point that can only be described as totalitarian. Combining complete political control with a clear vision of civil society as purely service deliverers, its critics hold, the government renders civil society's potential to push for democratisation essentially unrealistic.

In summary, then, the main arguments of this line of analysis are the following:

- Rwanda is highly authoritarian, and is possibly experiencing a further authoritarian drift
- State repression is the obstacle to further democratisation; nominally independent state institutions are manipulated and controlled by the RPF, and the development of a political society is obstructed. Civil society is controlled and forced into a role of service deliverer

- The decentralisation scheme is an attempt to further concentrate political power by disarming a possible source of opposition

6 Critical views

The two positions explored above differ in their assessments of the current political trend (democratisation – authoritarian drift) in Rwanda, the main obstacles to democratisation (lack of civil society capacity – state repression), and the nature of the decentralisation process (decentralisation of political power – further centralisation of political power). This section goes beyond these discussions by presenting a selection of complementary theories about the challenges facing nascent democracies and hybrid regimes in the postcolonial world, all of which are relevant in the Rwandan context. The question of the relative performance of Rwanda's (nominal) liberal democracy will give way to a more fundamental question, namely the *model* of democracy. Critics argue that the liberal model offered in the dominant paradigm of democracy promotion remains essentially elitist in the context of a continued divide between rights-bearing citizens and subjects unable to exercise their rights in a meaningful way. This discussion culminates in a case for a broadening understanding of *democracy*. Finally, an alternative analytical lens in the analysis of the decentralisation reform will be presented. It will be argued that the trend towards civil society participation and decentralisation reforms fit with a broader pattern amounting to a *localisation of politics*, leading to an eroding of autonomous political links between the state and its citizens.

6.1 Citizen and subject

In his book *Citizen and Subject* (1996), Mahmood Mamdani explores the legacy of European colonial rule in Africa and implications for political identity, power and democracy in post-colonial Africa. Mamdani argues that through indirect rule, colonialists constructed a 'bifurcated state' which separated citizens in the civic sphere and subjects, who were ruled by a native authority and stripped of civil and political rights, in the native sphere (Ibid: 205 – 206). The civic sphere became the exclusive property of a minority ethnic group, which was constructed as a different race - the Tutsi - that colonialists perceived to be more advanced than the 'natives' - the Hutu. By constructing a minority group as nonnative, in common with the coloniser, it created the distinction between civic citizenship, entailing individual rights in

the political and civil domain⁶⁶, and ethnic citizenship, guaranteeing for social and economic rights, such the rights to use land, by virtue of group membership (Mamdani 2001: 29).

In Rwanda, this transformation of ethnic into racial and political identities was made all the more potent as the Belgians did not ‘ethniticise’ the native authority to split the Hutu majority into different entities, as was common in other colonies. The Hutu majority was ruled by Tutsi chiefs, who were constructed as racially different and superior. Thus, the Belgians produced bipolar racial identities rather than plural ethnic identities among the colonised (Ibid: 35). After the departure of the Belgians in 1962, the first elected president of Rwanda, Grégoire Kayibanda, championed a racialised Hutu nationalism built on the very political identities institutionalised by colonialism. He thereby secured the continuation of a political system based on exclusion, although with the pattern of domination turned upside-down following the 1959 Hutu ‘social revolution’.

Few countries have managed to break with this legacy⁶⁷, and the distinction between rights bearing citizens and subjects remains relevant in analysis of politics in post-colonial states. According to Harris et al. (2004), little has changed in post-colonies with regard to the indirectly ruled majority of the population, who generally have remained ‘subjects’.

In present-day Rwanda the distinction between citizens and subjects corresponds with the division between a relatively small, wealthy, urban, and mainly Tutsi class on the one hand, and the majority poor, mainly Hutu, rural dwellers on the other. Accompanying the fundamental alteration of Rwanda’s demography in the aftermath of the genocide is the rapidly increasing economic inequality, favoring the urban elite and leaving the rural dwellers further marginalised. Rwanda’s Gini coefficient⁶⁸ has risen dramatically since the genocide⁶⁹, placing Rwanda among the top 15 % most unequal countries in the world. According to a UNDP study, ‘inequality in Rwanda is not only rising, it is changing in nature: it is becoming increasingly rural and increasingly detrimental to the poorest and most vulnerable groups in society’. The same study found that in the context of rapid economic growth, rural poverty was increasing in several areas: ‘in two out of five provinces, as well as in urban areas outside

⁶⁶ While full citizenship rights were preserved for the colonisers, members of the subject race were *virtual citizens*, considered to have the potential of becoming full citizens (Ibid: 27).

⁶⁷ Tanzania, with Nyerere’s strategy for promoting inclusive citizenship, might be a notable exception

⁶⁸ Measurement of inequality of income

⁶⁹ This trend started before the genocide, but the bulk of the increase has happened since 1994

of Kigali, the depth of poverty has actually increased since 2001, meaning that the average poor household in these areas is worse off today than it was five years ago' (UNDP: 17, 18).

Economic entitlements affect political entitlements in all market-based democracies (Grugel 2002: 5). However, in systems combining quasi-democratic politics with economic liberalism, such as Rwanda, this dynamic is much more pronounced. Economic and political power reinforce each other through processes of 'primitive accumulation'⁷⁰, benefiting a small political class with the right connections and knowledge. In this context, economic inequality impacts significantly on the exercise of citizenship and ultimately who determines the goals of development. When such disparities coincide with gender, race and ethnic divisions they undermine any claim to equal citizenship and the equal exercise of political rights (Pearce 2008: 106).

The near monopoly of political and economic power of a relatively small circle is well documented in Rwanda⁷¹, leaving citizens' rights devoid of meaning for the majority of the rural poor. The point to make here is not that citizenship necessarily is dictated by ethnic identity, but that the approximately 90 % (UNDP 2007: 75) of Rwandans who live off subsistence farming and often below the poverty line are politically marginalised, unable to exercise citizens' rights in any meaningful way. Without addressing such underlying structures and power-relations, Harris et al (2004: 17) argue, crafting decentralisation and civil society can be counterproductive rather than part of the solution to a democratic deficit.

6.2 Good governance and elite democracies

Discussions about democratisation in Africa has for the past two decades been largely absorbed by the concept of *good governance*, coined by the World Bank in a 1989 report identifying 'bad governance' as the root problem of Africa's continued crisis. While keeping with the Bank's purely technical language, it nevertheless became clear that good governance necessitated a liberal democracy and market-friendly policies. The good governance discourse thus contributes to legitimise certain forms of democratic politics, specifically the market-based liberal democracy, while delegitimising and silencing alternative democratic projects

⁷⁰ Term used for the accumulation of capital through political monopolies and coercive instruments of power

⁷¹ Reyntjens (2004) compares the new elite with the inner circle around former President Habyarimana, referring to an *akazu*, or 'little house, of insiders

(Abrahamsen 2002: 65; x). The liberal democratic model has assumed a global hegemonic status in democracy promotion. As Carothers (1997: 115, 117) notes:

Now that polyarchy⁷² has been conflated to the stable definition of democracy in both democratisation and democracy promotion literature, the idea of popular democracy is no longer on the democratic agenda

The western-style liberal model puts forward a narrow understanding of democracy and entails a political system in which vast social and economic inequalities co-exist with a small state with limited room for intervention. The detachment of democracy from ideals of social and economic rights, as opposed to just civil and political rights, amounts to an implicit endorsement of the existing social order. What is off the charts, then, is a model of democracy designed to address economic and social issues, or in other words an emancipatory political project from an unjust status quo (Shivji 2009; Hearn 1997: 15). Failing to address acute social and economic issues, the result of the imposition of the liberal model in developing countries has often been a form of democracy characterised by an inability to integrate the poorer sections of the population into the political processes in any meaningful way (Abrahamsen 2001: xiii).

The Rwandan government has embraced the idea of good governance, using it as a legitimising strategy both before the Rwandan population and foreign actors. Good governance materialises in Rwanda through the combination of an effective and disciplined state administration on the one hand, and a full-fledged capitalist economy on the other. In this context, the discourse on democratisation is limited to an emphasis of participation through civil society activity, while certain policies and political priorities are established *a-priori* to political debate. This, it is argued, represents a *depoliticised* view of processes of social change. The good governance discourse, then, holds out the prospect of a democracy with substance and depth but without political competition or conflict between different social groups and classes (Harris et al 2004: 8).

6.2.1 Substantive democratisation

⁷² Originally coined by Dahl (1971), polyarchy is attributed roughly the same meaning as ‘liberal democracy’. Robinson (1996) (in Hearn 1997: 15) defines polyarchy as ‘elite minority rule and socioeconomic inequalities alongside formal political freedom and elections involving universal suffrage’

It is becoming increasingly clear that the rapid conversion to liberal democratic models with multiparty systems and economic liberalisation has made little dent in the real-life conditions – whether political or economic – of the vast majority of the poor in Africa (Shivji 2009: 13). In this context, Harris et al. (2004) argue that there is a need to broaden understandings of democracy and democratisation from the minimalist definition applied in the dominant mode of democracy promotion. The emphasis on institutions and the ‘crafting’ of democracy, they argue, should be replaced with more substantial definitions that emphasise democratic principles and citizenship rights. Rather than assessing democracy on the basis of formal political institutions and instruments, then, it should be judged by whether people are able to make use of these instruments in order to reach political ends.

This alternative understanding corresponds to what Grugel (2002: 5) calls a rights-based, or substantive, democratisation, characterised by the introduction of citizenship rights rather than formal institutions. The litmus-test for democracy, he argues, should not be whether rights exist on paper, but whether they have real meaning for people (Ibid).

6.3 Decentralisation and the localisation of politics

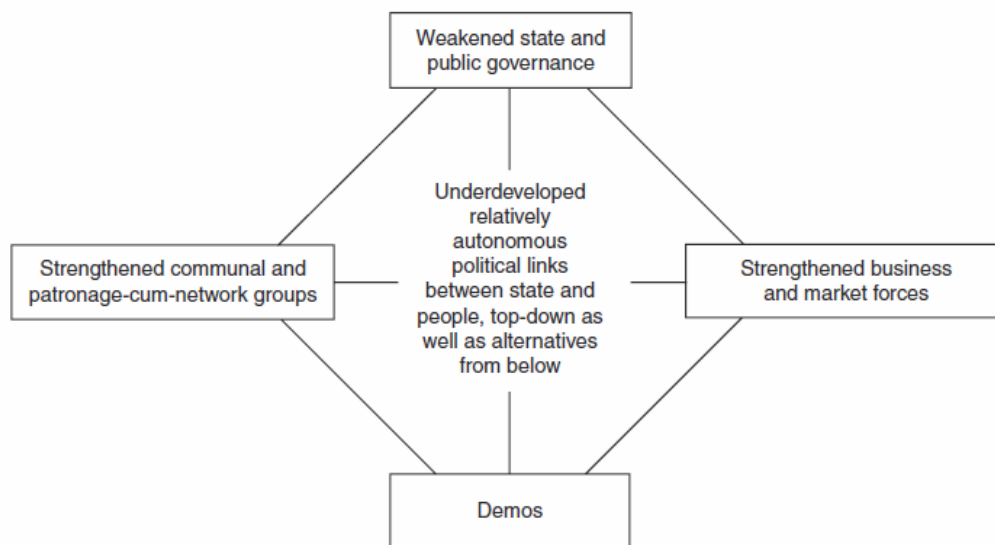
As demonstrated above, a collection of actors with presumably different political positions (including the government of Rwanda, the World Bank, bilateral donors guided by different political leaderships and left-wing INGOs such as the Norwegian People’s Aid) echo each other in prescribing civil society participation and particularly in local public spheres as the solution to Rwanda’s democratic deficit. This corresponds to what Harris et al. (2004: 1) call an ‘unlikely set of bedfellows’ that share an agenda of decentralisation and citizen participation in local political structures in order to promote democratisation and development.

Harris et al. (Ibid: 2) notes that the emphasis on local participation through civil society organisations fits in with broader trends of de-statistation (increased delegation of public matters to global markets through privatisation) and de-nationalisation (decentralisation reforms), amounting to a *localisation of politics* that leads political authority to become increasingly diffused among state, market and civil society actors. Localisation of politics is typically mediated through institutional reforms towards decentralisation, local democratisation and good governance, development discourse on local participation and civil

society, and localised political mobilisation around local, national and global issues (Ibid: 3). These facets, arguably constituting the essence of the dominant paradigm of democracy promotion, are all familiar from donors' programs in Rwanda.

The idea that a combination of decentralised civil society activists, local government and market agents will bring about democracy and development, or in the words of Harris et al (2004: 8) 'engage in a mutually reinforcing movement to produce all good things for all people', hardly seems realistic. Rather, it is argued, the result of this trend is the delegation of public matters of vital concern to market powers and civil society organisations with dubious democratic credentials. Törnquist (2009) identifies this *depoliticisation* of important public issues and interests as a major challenge to nascent democracies in the postcolonial world (figure 1). Through the combination of elitist institution building and increasingly fragmented citizen participation, major public concerns have become matters of technocratic governance (Ibid: 1).

Figure 1: The challenges of democratic popular control of public affairs (Törnquist 2009)



Despite the attraction of civil society activism among various actors across the political spectrum and its continued prominence in democracy promotion, however, actually existing civil society activism in the context of decentralisation and mobilisation around local issues does not appear to match up to normative expectations (Harris et al 2004: 205). Empirically, significant developments in civil society seem to have *followed* from rather than to have given rise to significant developments through state and politics (Ibid: 15). As Kasfir (1998: 132) notes, proponents of the civil society thesis may have gotten the causal relationship

backwards, as government policies and actions may do more to stimulate civil society organisation to form and respond rather than the other way around.

6.4 Summary

These contributions add a valuable dimension to the discussion about civil society and democratisation in Rwanda. The continuing divide between rights-bearing citizens and subjects unable to exercise their rights leaves the actual outcome of often well-intentioned crafting of civil society and decentralisation uncertain, and potentially even counterproductive. The combination of an emphasis on civil society, participation in local political structures and the delegation of important public matters to the sphere of the market through privatisation constructs an unconstitutional, de-institutionalised and de-politicised model of democracy.

In summarising, the following arguments are especially relevant in the Rwandan context:

- The dominant school of democratisation, which fits well with the regime's discourse, holds out a prospect of democracy devoid of power struggles and rules out alternative understandings of democracy
- There is a continued divide between citizens and subject, with the large majority of rural poor being denied the exercise of civil and political rights
- With decentralisation and civil society crafting, there is a trend towards a localisation of politics. In the process, autonomous links between the state and its citizens are eroding as channels for participation and influence are increasingly diffused to arenas such as civil society activity, local government and the market

7 Empirical Analysis

The main arguments explored in the last three chapters provide the point of departure for the ensuing analysis of two key processes in contemporary Rwanda.

The first process in question is the formulation and implementation of the government's long-term development strategy, the *Vision 2020*, which lays out the overarching priorities and spells out the direction for Rwanda's development. It is periodically operationalised in medium-term strategies, such as the recent EDPRS which is valid for the period 2008 – 2012 (World Bank a). The overall goal of the *Vision 2020* is to 'transform Rwanda into a middle income country' by 2020 (GoR 2000a: 4). This goal is extremely ambitious, taking into account that Rwanda was ranked 153rd out of 169 countries in the 2010 UN Human Development Index (UNDP a).

The *Vision 2020* is not just a planning document or a set of guidelines; it drives all policymaking in the country. All policy decisions must accord with its broad and ambitious goals (Whelan 2011: 16). Among the principal tools to achieve the overall goal is the planned major transformation and modernisation of rural Rwanda. It envisages a substantive decrease in the proportion of the population depending on agricultural activities, from 90 percent in 2000 to 50 percent in 2020 (GoR 2000a: 26). If civil society is to perform its role in informing policies and holding government accountable, then, their role in the *Vision 2020* is surely the litmus test.

The second process in question is Rwanda's decentralisation reform. First initiated through a 2000 Policy Paper, the process was boosted with the 2007 Rwanda Decentralisation Strategic Framework (RDSF). Intending to 'impose itself as the principal focus of governance reform', the decentralisation process is simultaneously designed to secure the attainment of the *Vision 2020* (GoR 2007a: 3). By defining the framework for the exercise of power and patterns for citizen participation, the decentralisation process is fundamentally shaping state-society relations. Though still an on-going process, a few careful, empirical investigations have documented various preliminary results at the local level.

The main findings from the previous chapters and the point of departure for the ensuing analysis can be summarised as follows:

Table 1: Views of Rwanda's democratic deficit

	The liberal view	Authoritarian Structures view	Critical views
Current political development	Democratisation	Continued authoritarianism, possibly worsening	Subordinate issue; the problem is the elitist model of democracy
Obstacle for democratisation	Lack of citizen and civil society capacity	State repression	Power relations: lack of rights-bearing citizens
Regime intention with decentralisation	New arenas for civil society, further democratisation	Further centralisation of RPF power	Towards a localisation of politics

7.1 Vision 2020

The *Vision 2020* is typically viewed by donors as a 'breath of fresh air' in a context of poorly designed development strategies in other African countries (Whelan 2011: 16). The UN praises the document for constituting 'a perfect example of a localised MDG [Millennium Development Goal]-based development strategy' (UNDP 2007: 13). The plan rests on six pillars, of which the following three are most important for our purpose here: i) good governance and a capable state; ii) agricultural transformation; and iii) development of a private sector (GoR 2000a: 4)⁷³. These priorities resonate exceptionally well with the good governance discourse, to the thrill of aid workers frustrated with the lack of progress elsewhere. To ensure the democratic legitimacy of the policies, civil society consultations have been conducted both in the formulation of the *Vision 2020* itself (Ibid: 2) and its operationalised medium-term strategies (World Bank a).

Rural Transformation

Despite stipulating a 40 percent decrease of the population engaged in agricultural production, the *Vision 2020* does not present a clear strategy for the future employment of the millions of

⁷³ The three remaining pillars are human resources development, infrastructural development and promotion of regional cooperation

people expected to abandon their land. The majority of the ‘surplus’ rural population is expected to live in urban centers by the end of the strategy period, with an increase in urban dwellers from 10 to 30 percent of the population (GoR 2000a: 26). To the extent that possible scenarios for these people are explored, they hardly seem realistic. For instance, the first Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper under the *Vision 2020* explores the opportunity to ‘leap-frog the stage of industrialisation and transform Rwanda’s subsistence economy into a service-sector driven, high value-added information- and knowledge-based economy that can compete on the global market’ (Ibid: 13).

The main concern of the government is the professionalisation and modernisation of the farming sector, clearly favoring competitive and commercial farmers while disregarding equitable wealth distribution and threatening to enfeeble small-scale farmers (Ansoms 2009: 12). To commence the transformation process, the government has initiated a ‘villagisation’ program designed to resettle rural dwellers in local towns. Under this scheme, people are forcibly moved from their huts and relocated in villages in order to free up land destined for large-scale agricultural production (Ibid). Before the end of 2011, the government aims to eradicate every straw hut in the entire country as part of the relocation scheme, with people told to ‘stay with relatives’ when their homes are demolished. Paul Kagame himself warned that district leaders who do not succeed in meeting this target will be ‘punished’ (Bistandsaktuelt 2011a). In the pursuit of transforming the agricultural sector into a motor for economic growth, the government has abolished limitations on allowable land holdings, and begun to demand that farmers cultivate certain cash crops (Des Forges 2005: 368). In sum, then, the policies for rural transformation under the *Vision 2020* are designed to benefit a small class of elite, professional farmers (Ibid).

While the advisability of these policies is a matter of political debate, moving millions of people from their pieces of land to urban centers where they might find work in the service sector once Rwanda has leap-frogged industrialisation, hardly seems like a policy-plan informed by poor rural dwellers. The modernisation of the rural sector, entailing the abolishment of limitations on allowable land holdings in a desperately overpopulated country with acute land shortage, and the forced relocation of poor, small-scale peasants is also a curious result of ‘grassroots consultations’ designed to give ‘voice to the poor’.

Good Governance and private sector development

Other central, and complementary, goals in the *Vision 2020* are the practice of good governance and the development of an efficient private sector (GoR 2000a: 4). Good governance has since its introduction been a loosely defined set of ideas changing over time and contexts, prone to being used by different actors for different ends (Shivji 2009: 24). The relative importance of *democratic* governance has varied, but might currently be on the rise. The recent trend among development practitioners to broaden their concept of good governance, by defining it in terms of political concepts such as responsiveness and accountability, has left the line between good governance as a non-ideological concept and an intrinsic democratic concept thin (Carothers 2010: 21, 22).

The Rwandan regime, however, has embraced the good governance concept in its original form as first conceptualised by the World Bank in 1989, with democracy less of a priority than effective administration and economic liberalisation (Abrahamsen 2002). Fully compatible with this concept, the RPF equates good governance with democracy; citing effective state administration, low levels of corruption and ‘sound’ macro-political management as evidence of the benevolent and hence democratic nature of the regime.

Central to this perception of good governance is economic liberalisation. The RPF regime has embraced market liberalism with full force, to the excitement of the World Bank and the global business community. Rwanda was named the top performer in the world in the World Bank’s ‘Doing Business Report 2010’ (African Development Bank 2009a), and the Bank’s Country Director, Johannes Zutt, recently encouraged other African countries to ‘learn from Rwanda’s rapid business transformation to improve the business climate’ (New Times 2011a). Paul Kagame enjoys close ties with the American business community, regularly giving talks at Harvard Business School and the likes, spurring articles such as ‘Why CEOs love Rwanda’ in Fortune Magazine (CNN 2007a). As demonstrated above, this logic also permeates the *Vision 2020*’s strategy to transform rural society.

Recalling the dramatic rise of Rwanda’s Gini coefficient since the genocide and the *worsening* of poverty in large parts of the country despite an economic boom, the effects of economic liberalisation are being felt by the poor majority. This tendency is a direct result of the same liberal policies encouraged by Western donors since the introduction of structural adjustment in Africa in 1979. However, the acceptance and popularity of these policies among ordinary Rwandans is less certain. One can only assume that the significant number of

poor peasants who have seen a worsening of their conditions are not as enthusiastic as the American CEOs who love Rwanda.

Again, the top-down nature of the *Vision 2020* seems out of the box, leaving the donors' praise of the document awkward. The picture that emerges is one of a development plan that is perfectly aligned with the principles of the hegemonic global order of economic liberalisation and the good governance discourse, but with a highly uncertain anchoring in the Rwandan population. While the international business community and the World Bank go out of their way to celebrate the RPF's drive towards what Sebarenzi (2009: 209) calls an 'ultracapitalist economy', Rwandan trade unions' demands for protection of workers' rights are brushed aside⁷⁴.

This easy co-existence between Rwanda's model of consensual democracy and the good governance discourse reveals a basic similarity between the two. The notion of the existence of an objective 'best policy'⁷⁵ features as an underlying assumption in both models. Certain policies are seen as self-evident, and policy making a matter of common sense. In the good governance discourse economic liberalisation is seen as the universal best policy, while Rwanda's consensual democracy presents RPF political priorities as working for the greater good. Illustrative of this, when then Speaker of Parliament, Joseph Sebarenzi, confronted Paul Kagame after the RPF introduced an unconstitutional institutional arrangement as part of the consensual democracy model; Kagame retorted 'What we do we do for the good of the country!' (Ibid: 144).

Given the existence of formal consultative frameworks provided by the government in relation to the formulation of the *Vision 2020*, why is the outcome policies that attempt to re-engineer rural society in a way that accentuates inequality and leaves the subsistence peasants – the grand majority of Rwandans – stranded?

7.1.1 Authoritarian structures view

According to proponents of the authoritarian structures view, this is due to the government's reluctance to include civil society in genuine policy consultations and its conceptualisation of civil society as an 'extension of the state' (Burnet 2008: 375). This view is backed by

⁷⁴ Field notes: interview with management representative of Rwandan trade union COTRAF

⁷⁵ Note the curious (and telling) parallel to Lenin's notion of the 'people's objective interests'

observations from a local level, which describe the nature of the alleged ‘consultation meetings’ as more of ‘information events’. According to Gready (2010: 641), the events take a ‘tendency towards information sharing and instruction, particularly at a more local level. Furthermore, consultation invariably declines over time and policies are frequently reclaimed by the government’. Ansoms (2009: 308) observed the lack of genuine ‘room for grassroots participation or for bottom-up feedback’ in the implementation of the development agenda.

Adding to this picture is the well documented fear among civil society activists of engaging in political matters, with the Kituo Cha Katiba fact-finding mission concluding that ‘the last thing NGOs in Rwanda want to be is political’ (Peter & Kibalama 2006: 162). Despite the existence of formal consultative frameworks, then, civil society is unable to make use of this space due to the hostile climate for genuine dialogue (Eurac 2011: 5). Thus, by simultaneously creating formal spaces for policy influence and making it resoundingly clear that civil society organisations which engage in politics will be regarded as opposition, the government creates the conditions for a fundamentally a-political and passive civil society that serves a useful, legitimising purpose for the government in their interaction with the donor community (Beswick 2010: 248).

One could conclude, then, in line with the authoritarian structures view, that civil society is ‘controlled by the regime’ (Reyntjens 2004: 1107). However, this is arguably too sweeping; there remain occasional spaces – created by electoral politics, progressive development initiatives, and the dependence of the government of external actors – that can be identified and exploited by donors and civil society (Gready 2010: 642). While governments of hybrid regimes may operate nominally democratic institutions with authoritarian logic, the imperative to uphold a façade of democracy to claim legitimacy in the eyes of the international community necessitates the existence of a minimum of political space⁷⁶.

The nature of these spaces in Rwanda, however, are largely *ad hoc* and personalised, rather than being based on institutional relationships between society and the state (Uvin & Unsworth 2002; Gready 2010: 638). In a careful empirical analysis, Gready (2010) documents the high complexity of the strategies and negotiations applied by INGOs in order to make their views heard in policy-making circles, amounting to an undertaking of grand proportions which is hardly realistic for the average poor Rwandan peasant. These spaces,

⁷⁶ The existence of these spaces, Hadenius & Teorell (2007) argue, is the reason that hybrid regimes appear to be statistically less stable than more ideal type democracies or fully authoritarian regimes

then, though existent, are largely unavailable to exploit by groups and individuals who demand access to their rights as citizens.

Paradoxically, donors are seemingly adding to this trend by their failure to match practice with rhetoric when it comes to donor harmonisation, and relying on personal connections and networks in the allocation of money to organisations and projects (Unsworth & Uvin 2002). The apparent lack of common criteria for funding shared by donors, or even objective and transparent criteria for support available from single donors, stimulate widespread ‘donor shopping’ among civil society organisations in Rwanda⁷⁷. Indeed, civil society representatives regularly complain that donors provide unreliable funding, lack a coordinated approach, require much conditionality, lack the will to fund operational costs and promote disunity within civil society by favoring some on flimsy grounds (Peter & Kibalama 2006: 139- 40). In this context donors are contributing to a culture of clientilism, in which personal connections, inside information and coincidence determine different actors’ relative influence (Unsworth & Uvin 2002). Tellingly, the country director of a large INGO in Kigali who recently initiated an ambitious civil society strengthening project told me that it would ‘never have been approved by the authorities without my personal connection in the power apparatus’.

7.1.2 The liberal view

According to the donor view, the apparent lack of policy influence by civil society actors is due to their low capacity, rather than the result of state interference. Inspired by Scott’s (1998) classic *Seeing Like a State*, an aid official representing a key donor emphasised during an interview in Kigali the need to build civil society capacity to ‘guide government decisions’ in order to avoid disastrous schemes undertaken by a government detached from ordinary people’s lives⁷⁸. Using Julius Nyerere’s villagisation project under the *Ujamaa* development plan in Tanzania as a worst case scenario, Rwanda’s current villagisation was not brought up. The paradox is that in Rwanda, as in many African countries where civil society organisations are kept weak by autocratic regimes, it is the donors who in reality constitute the main checks and balances on government (Brown 2011: 10)⁷⁹.

⁷⁷ Field notes

⁷⁸ Field notes

⁷⁹ This is also a personal observation from civil society work in Mozambique and Liberia. I’ve witnessed some of the supposedly strongest civil society organisations in these countries pleading with donors to push for certain

The donors, then, are on the one hand pushing local civil society organisations to act as a check against misguided policies (such as, arguably, the ‘villagisation’ scheme), and on the other hand providing the government with much-needed budget support largely free of conditionality. By simultaneously strengthening the capacity of the government, which has a clear and pronounced preference for an a-political civil society, and providing a comparatively miniscule support to civil society, the donors’ intervention is not likely to moderate the top-down nature of the implementation of the *Vision 2020*. This paradox illustrates the futility of conceptualising civil society without relating to state power.

The failure of donors to fully appreciate the government’s preferred mode of civil society is striking. The government line in principle inhibits civil society to perform practically all functions that donors value about it, and which constitute the grounds for its positive contribution to democratisation within the liberal discourse (influencing policy, demanding accountability, etc.). The gap in perceptions of civil society’s role occasionally creates a rare source of tension between the government and its donors. During a recent retreat for the government and the donors, a government representative demanded that the donors ‘justify why they support civil society for purposes of Transparency [and] Accountability’ (GoR 2010a).

Rather than relating to the government line, however, donors express frustration that ‘civil society is unclear about its role’ (Peter & Kibalama 2006: 138)⁸⁰. Why, then, do donors appear to ignore the fundamental reluctance among civil society organisations to engage in politics and instead continue to insist that it is their natural role? Part of the answer, I argue, lies with the internal dynamics of the aid industry. The event that more than any other instilled a culture of fear and self-censorship among civil society activists is widely regarded to have been the 2004 Parliamentary Report incident, when potentially threatening civil society organisations (such as LIPRODHOR) were disciplined and disarmed by the regime (Beswick 2010: 248). However, embassies’ and aid missions’ institutional memory appear to be short, mainly due to the short postings of aid officials (Brown 2011: 11), and not a single one of my donor informants mentioned the 2004 incident during our long talks about Rwandan civil society⁸¹. Aid officials’ short memory is a useful and familiar tool for

policies in meetings with the government, claiming that ‘the donors are the only actors powerful enough to influence policy’

⁸⁰ This was also a recurrent theme during my interviews with donors.

⁸¹ Rather, a civil society representative expressed frustration that no one seems to remember this incident

governments in many African countries trying to navigate between demands from external donors and domestic constituencies. Moreover, it is probably accentuated in Rwanda due to the fact that Kigali is not a particularly attractive posting for aid officials who are more likely to seek re-postings in cosmopolitan and comfortable places such as Dakar or Maputo.

As discussed above, donors' support to civil society in Rwanda clearly benefits urban-based, professionalised, advocacy-oriented organisations with middle-class leaderships. The *Kituo Cha Kabita* (Peter & Kibalama 2006: 77) mapping exercise concluded that Rwandan civil society was split between organisations at a grassroots level composed of informal associations often not bound by legal formalities on the one hand, and formal national civil society organisations which are mainly funded by foreign donors on the other. Thus, donors appear not to be funding the popular sectors of society, but rather strengthening what Hearn (1997: 4) calls a 'new African elite' committed to the promotion of a limited form of procedural democracy and structural adjustment type economic policies in partnerships with the West. The high frequencies of trained civil society activists who are recruited by the Rwandan government⁸² or donors⁸³, both of which offer higher salaries, reinforce the image of a new elite in the making through civil society support.

The donors' intervention, then, appears to contribute to what Ottaway (2008: 170) calls a 'bifurcated' civil society. This is characterised by a small, democratic but essentially elitist section supported by external donors on the one hand, and a less formal, traditional civil society on the other. This seems to be an accurate description of Rwandan civil society, which is characterised by a dense network of a-political grassroots cooperatives and religious associations in rural areas and professionalised organisations in urban centers (Peter & Kibalama 2006: 77). Thus, Rwanda is a case in point for Kasfir's (1998: 124) assertion that Africa has long been 'rich in associational life but poor in democracy'.

7.1.3 Critical views

Among the rare instances of apparent civil society influence on policy in postwar Rwanda⁸⁴ was the successful advocacy efforts undertaken by women's umbrella *Pro-Femmes* and allies

⁸² Field notes

⁸³ Field notes. Also a personal observation from civil society work in Mozambique, where skilled civil society activists were employed by donors

⁸⁴ This incident took place before the period under scrutiny in this paper (2000 – 2010), but as it inspires donors in present-day Rwanda as a success story, it deserves attention here

to pass an inheritance bill making it legal for women to inherit property in 1998 (Burnet 2008). This incident is often referred to by donors as an example of ‘best practice’ and proves that there are opportunities within the RPF regime. However, this process took place while the RPF was still ruling with constraints under the Government of National Unity, and before they codified their vision of civil society with strict laws and regulations in 2001. From a critical perspective, this success can be explained by the close ties between *Pro-Femmes* and the RPF (Reyntjens 2004: 184). Recalling the empirical indications that significant developments in civil society seem to have followed from, rather than to have given rise to, significant developments through state and politics (Harris et al. 2004: 15), the close alliance between the RPF and *Pro-Femmes* might go a long way in explaining this outcome.

The apparent failure to incorporate the views of the poor rural dwellers that now face eviction under the implementation of the *Vision 2020* might, from a critical perspective, be due to underlying power relations in civil society and resulting defunct representation. The stated intention of the civil society consultations, as formulated by the World Bank, is ‘to give voice to ‘poor and excluded [people], who are represented by civil society organisations’ (World Bank a). However, given the continued divide between rights-bearing citizens and subjects who are unable to exercise their rights, civil society consultations are no guarantee for the inclusion of the concerns of the poor majority.

In most nascent democracies and hybrid regimes, with Rwanda being a case in point, civil society in terms of associational life among rights-bearing citizens is often confined to middle-class activists (Törnquist 2009: 5). Representatives of civil society organisations are rarely subject to elections or scrutiny from their alleged constituencies. The paradox of civil society representation is that although a technocrat administration might suffer from distrust and a dubious claim to democratic legitimacy, as is the case in Rwanda, the civil society alternatives often have even weaker claims to democratic legitimacy (Lavalle 2009). While internal democracy in Rwandan civil society organisations surely is a mixed bag, several of my (both donor and civil society) informants in Kigali lamented the ‘top-heavy’ and undemocratic nature of the few organisations that regularly interacted with government on policy formulation. Thus, the fundamental assumption among donors that civil society participation should compensate for the democratic deficit in Rwanda’s formal political structures risks further marginalising Rwanda’s poor by way of forced representation.

7.2 Decentralisation – preliminary outcomes

As demonstrated above, the decentralisation process is perceived in fundamentally different ways by donors and critics of the regime. While it is still an ongoing process, some preliminary outcomes have been documented.

The literature has historically diverged on the role of local authorities as either enforcers of RPF policy or active interpreters. In his empirical investigation into the dynamics of policies folding into implementation, Gready (2010) shows how local authorities' role in determining the outcome of two of Rwanda's most pressing policy issues – land reform and the *gacaca* courts⁸⁵ – is beyond question. Meanwhile, their role in informing policy upwards is limited, as RPF priorities are established by a small political elite and passed downwards. Des Forges (2005: 354) describes a system in which local administrative officials have enjoyed 'considerable autonomy' in implementing land reform policies provided that they are in line with overall RPF policy objectives. With decentralisation, however, this appears to be changing in the direction of increased centralised control through i) the appointment of RPF cadres as mid-level servants in rural areas (Silva-Leander 2008: 1618) and ii) the elimination of intermediary links between central political authority and local authorities.

Central in the current decentralisation process is the introduction of a series of 'performance-based contractual arrangements' (*imihigo*) officially intended to reinforce linkages between decentralisation and the *Vision 2020* (GoR 2007a). Under this scheme, intermediary links between the top political authority (President Kagame himself) and local administrators are removed. While according to the government line this arrangement is intended to increase accountability from the grassroots up, the opposite seems to be the outcome. With district mayors and even individual households signing performance contracts directly with the President, accountability is *reversed* as the local units are held directly accountable for the extent to which they have met the set targets⁸⁶. According to Eurac (2011a: 5), while;

The official discourse is that the performance contracts are a means by which citizens get involved in decision-making (...), in reality the people are constrained to work towards objectives which have been drawn up without any popular participation

⁸⁵ Rwanda's judicial arrangement to deliver justice in relation to the genocide

⁸⁶ Recall that Kagame promised to 'punish' mayors who do not meet the target of destructing all straw huts in their district

This increased upwards accountability simultaneously weakens local authorities' room for interpretation and adjusting national policies to the local level. Signing performance contracts with district mayors makes the district the central unit in the decentralisation policy, and the core level for national policies and targets to be re-stated in local plans. According to Ansoms (2009: 307), who has studied the rural transformation project from a local perspective, both the central administration and local peasants regard local authorities as purely an implementing body for national strategies, without sufficient influence to translate or reinterpret. It is worth quoting at length one human rights campaigner, recorded by Ansoms (Ibid: 306-7):

Laws are implemented in an authoritarian way and the population cannot say 'no' to the authorities. In fact, the current leaders receive their instructions and have to implement. I do not believe in the district mayors; they are commissioners of the RPF. They are the link between the RPF and the population, not chosen but imposed. And they receive good salaries for it. They are not at all close to the population; often they are not even from the region they rule⁸⁷ (...)

Several observers note that the current decentralisation is *administrative* in nature, without being accompanied by resources or political power (Silva-Leander 2008: 1618)⁸⁸.

Furthermore, RPF cadres are placed as mid-level public servants in rural areas, enabling the RPF to strengthen its control over rural areas, to which they have few links (Ibid).

7.2.1 Authoritarian structures view

Contrary to the donors' assertion that the decentralisation process opens up 'new spaces for participation', then, decentralisation so far seems to have allowed the central political authority to extend its influence to the local level. Based on the preliminary outcomes of the decentralisation reform, it seems to be best explained by proponents of the authoritarian structures view. The political elite's detachment from rural society (as manifested partly in the *Vision 2020* rural transformation scheme) remains one of its principal challenges to exercise full control over Rwandan territory and society. Through a series of measures that seem to result in decreased room for interpretation among local authorities and increased accountability to central political power all the way to household levels, local actors are brought into the RPF fold.

⁸⁷ This latter observation was confirmed during one of my interviews with a civil society representative in Kigali

⁸⁸ This was a recurrent observation during my interviews with civil society representatives

According to the most radical proponents of the authoritarian structures argument the top-down natured attempt to transform rural society and the apparent attempt to concentrate political power through the decentralisation process must be regarded as an attempt by a Tutsi minority elite to extend their control over the Hutu majority. However, I agree with Silva-Leander (2008) that this oversimplifies the complex reality of Rwanda. It is erroneous to view RPF's political project as being limited to secure absolute Tutsi power. During the civil war the RPF was able to attract numerous Hutu to its ranks, who rejected the ethnic divisionism of the Habyarimana regime. Current RPF policies on ethnicity, whatever their merit, continue to be consistent with the ideology that the RPF promoted before the genocide and their ascendancy to power.

7.2.2 Critical views

From a critical perspective, the decentralisation process fits in with the broader trend towards a localisation of politics in which autonomous links between the state and its inhabitants are increasingly eroded and replaced by market forces, local political structures and civil society activism. This argument is, however, only partly relevant in the Rwandan context. While the government embraces economic liberalisation on the one hand and decentralisation and citizens participation in local politics on the other, they retain much control by defining the actual content of these processes.

Markets in Rwanda are largely dominated by the political class through processes of primitive accumulation (Reyntjens 2004). This phenomenon is less excessive in Rwanda than in many other African countries, partly because of Paul Kagame's strong dislike of self-enriching politicians. Kagame is famous in Africa for dispossessing ministers of their luxury cars in 2004 (Kinzer 2008: 237), and serious measures to battle corruption has made Rwanda relatively uncorrupt in a regional comparative perspective. Still, this has not prevented the political elite from exploiting their positions to accumulate wealth, establishing a political class in Rwanda (Sebarenzi 2009).

Neither decentralisation nor civil society, then, appears to come in the form expected by the outsiders promoting these institutions in Rwanda. Rather than diffusing political authority, preliminary outcomes suggest that the opposite is taking place. In terms of opportunities to participate in politics, then, Rwanda's 'subjects' seem to lose at both ends. *Formal* autonomous links between the state and the population are eroding, as they dissolve into a

complex of fragmented political arenas. However, as the political elite defines the actual content of these institutions in ways that favor them, even actors who master the arenas of the free market and civil society activity are unlikely to succeed in influencing policy and setting agendas.

8 Conclusion

The point of departure for this thesis was the persistent elitist nature of African politics and the sustained belief in democracy promotion circles in civil society support as a tool to promote democratisation. Focusing on the case of Rwanda, the study has been able to identify key dynamics in the interplay of donors, civil society and state power that dictate the outcome in terms of democratisation.

Overall, there are few indications that donor support to civil society in the period 2000 – 2010 has contributed to democratisation in Rwanda. This holds true whether one applies a liberal, minimalist definition of democratisation characterised by political liberalisation within the edifice of formal institutions, or more substantive definitions characterised by the extension of citizenship and citizens' rights.

8.1.1 Substantive democratisation

Findings from the research support existing theories holding that the failure to promote *substantive* democratisation and inclusionary democracy is due to inherent limitations within the liberal discourse on civil society and democratisation. In Rwanda, as is the case in much of the postcolonial world, poverty and social exclusion operate as real barriers to citizenship (Grugel 2002: 5). More specifically, Rwandan state – society relations are characterised by the continued divide between rights-bearing citizens and subjects, leaving participation in political matters through civil society activity unattainable for large sections of the Rwandan population. Indeed, both economic and political inequalities seem to be on the rise in Rwanda. Through economic liberalisation the postwar political elite is consolidating its dominant position, while poverty is worsening in parts of rural Rwanda despite the economic boom. Simultaneously, the political elite looks to be concentrating political power through the decentralisation reform, although evidence is too scarce to infer definitely. More research into how the decentralisation process plays out on the local level is needed.

The research also indicates that donor interventions in Rwanda might be *counterproductive* to promoting substantive democratisation. While the hybrid nature of Rwanda's political system offers opportunities for civil society to participate and influence policy, these spaces are *ad hoc* and personalised, and require elaborate political strategies that are largely unattainable for Rwanda's poor majority. Rather than setting a good example by relating to Rwandan citizens

in a predictable, coherent and institutionalised manner, however, donors themselves add to a culture of clientilism through inconsistent behaviour, lack of transparency and the personalised nature of their interaction with civil society organisations. This is at the core of the concept of substantive forms of democratisation, as it relates to the ability of ordinary Rwandans to make use of political instruments (or here, donor support) rather than their mere existence.

8.1.2 Minimalist democratisation

The research also indicates that to the extent that Rwanda's (nominal) liberal democratic system is changing, it is tightening, moving towards increased authoritarianism rather than democratising. In this context, donor support to civil society seems to have little, if any, impact. This, I have argued, is due to the strength of the Rwandan state, which is exceptional in a regional comparative perspective, combined with the government's clear and pronounced vision of civil society's role, characterised by a 'you are either with us or against us' rationale (Gready 2010). The government has largely been able to shape civil society accordingly, with the result being a fundamentally a-political and passive civil society which serves a legitimising role for the government (Beswick 2011).

This research has demonstrated that donors fail to fully appreciate the government's preferred mode of civil society. This appears to be partly due to limited contextual knowledge, and partly to the aid enterprise's lack of tools and a reluctance to deal with authoritarian political structures. The result is at any rate a rather curious situation, in which donors continue to support civil society organisations to perform a set of functions that they are largely unable to carry out. While donors insist that civil society's role is in advocacy and accountability, the government insists that it's not. More support to civil society is unlikely to alter the equation, as donors are simultaneously strengthening state power with considerable resources.

While donors agree that Rwandan civil society is 'weak', they appear to pay little attention to *why* this is the case (beyond invoking the destructive effects of the civil war and the genocide). If civil society is deliberately kept 'weak' by the state power, as most research suggest, the various civil society strengthening programs are bound to have little impact if not increasingly tied up to efforts to work with the government to push for a more favourable environment for civil society.

8.1.3 Impact on Rwandan civil society

While donor support to civil society seems to have had little effect on Rwanda's political structures, its impact in forming actual civil society is more significant. Rather than contributing to a democratisation of civil society in which ordinary Rwandans organise to work for political ends, however, it appears to have contributed to the creation of a 'bifurcated' civil society reminiscent of Mamdani's theories of the bifurcated colonial state. While ostensibly democratic in nature, the new elite section of civil society is characterised by its detachment from ordinary, poor Rwandan's daily lives.

As demonstrated above, an advocacy-oriented civil society is considered a key institution in liberal democracies. Thus, the existence of this segment of civil society adds to the institutional landscape of Rwanda's nominal liberal democracy. However, given its limited ability to perform the key functions of influencing policy and holding government accountable, its contribution to democratisation is questionable.

8.1.4 Limitations to donor interventions

The donors' close relationship to the government and its interaction with middle-class activists as representatives for Rwandan civil society reveals a fundamental trait of the aid enterprise. Its top-down, external nature limits its ability to connect with ordinary Rwandans and leads it to interact with political elites and the forces of exclusion of the day (Uvin 1998: 5). Tellingly, the donors' contribution to democratisation in pre-genocide Rwanda appeared to be of little interest or relevance to the rural masses, who perceived democratisation as an urban game with foreign rules and foreign referees (Reyntjens 1994: 221).

While the different perceptions of civil society's role produce the odd moment of tension between donors and the government, the relationship is largely an easy one, with few instances of direct confrontations over governance issues. Although there has been an increase in aid to strengthen 'voice and accountability' through civil society, there is limited real pressure to push for greater change (Hayman 2009: 74). The findings from this research support Beswick's (2010: 246) assertion that the lack of significant tension is due to the alignment of priorities of key donors and the Rwandan government. Rwanda's model of consensual democracy embodies fundamental traits of the good governance discourse, at least in its original form. Economic liberalisation and the existence of nominal liberal democratic

institutions are the building blocks of both models, while the capacity and opportunities of ordinary Rwandans to make use of these instruments is less of a priority.

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